LIVES OF E. & R. ERSKINE.

BY

JOHN KER, D.D.

AND

JEAN L. WATSON.

THE ERSKINES: EBENEZER AND RALPH.

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RALPH AND EBENEZER ERSKINE.

BY

JOHN KER, D.D.

EBENEZER AND RALPH ERSKINE.

THE two brothers, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, lead us to the origin of the Secession Church, one of the branches of what is now known as the United Presbyterian. We may mention, for the sake of the general reader, that the other branch of that Church, the Relief, had its own founder, Thomas Gillespie, second to none in his day for sincerity of heart and elevation of character; and that, besides Ebenezer Erskine, there were, at the immediate origin of the Secession, three other men of much force and individuality,—William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher,—thus parting the parent stream, like a more ancient river, into four heads. At present, we shall confine our notice to the two Erskines, including brief glances at the men around them, and the events that have followed, so far as suggested by their work.

The Erskines were from several causes urged into a more prominent place, and they have, through their writings, left us means of forming a more distinct

estimate of their relation to their time, and of their bearing on the religious history of Scotland. They belonged to an old and honourable family that draws its name from the Parish of Erskine on the Clyde, Ir-isgin, *the green mound,* and that carries them to the seat of the ancient British stock which fixed its names on the soil and lingered there to the dawn of written Scottish history. One of the family took a foremost place in the Reformation, when, along with Argyle and Glencairn, in 1557, Erskine of Dun subscribed the Godly Band, or, as we shonld now call it, the Religious Bond, and became one of the Lords of the Congregation. The branch of the family to which the fathers of the Secession belonged was the Erskines of Shielfield, near Dryburgh, and their father was Henry Erskine, a minister whose life was passed in the most troublous times of Scottish Church history. He was settled at Cornhill, in Northumberland, and was one of the Nonconformists ejected on St Bartholomew's Day, 1662. He removed into Scotland and suffered fine, imprisonment, and exile, under the Episcopal domination of the time. After the Revolution, he became minister of Whitsome, and then of Chirnside, in Berwickshire, where he died in 1696; and it was under his ministry that the famous Thomas Boston received his first religious impressions. His death was as remarkable as his life for its Christian faith, and made such an impression on his two

sons, that they often spoke of it afterwards as that which determined their religious character. The mother of Ebenezer and Ralph was Margaret Halcro, from Orkney, of Scandinavian lineage, descended from Halcro, Prince of Denmark, and springing, not very remotely, from the Stuart line, by a granddaughter of James V. Those who believe in the influence of blood might find a curious union of the Celtic fervour and the Norse resolution in these fathers of the Secession.

Ebenezer, the elder brother, was born at Dryburgh. A fragment of the house occupied by his father is pointed out, not far from the venerable Abbey which so many visit to see the last resting-place of Sir Walter Scott, looking down on "Tweed's fair flood and all o'er Teviotdale." The year of his birth was exactly two hundred years ago, in 1680, the time of the Queensferry Paper and Sanquhar Declaration, and other appeals to God and man uplifted by the almost despairing remnant that stood at bay after Bothwell, and that were afterwards cast into the hottest of the furnace, known by the persecuted as "the Killing time." It was just a hundred years later, in 1780, when Moderatism was darkest, that Thomas Chalmers was born, as if God's witnesses, and the Church's children of revival, came into the world at the hour of midnight.

He was educated at the University of Edinburgh, to which he went when only fourteen; but he studied

for nine years, five in classics and philosophy, and four in theology. He was licensed to preach when twenty-three years of age, by the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, and settled in 1703 at Portmoak, a quiet rural parish at the foot of the twin Lomonds, and skirting the shore of the picturesque Loch Leven. An island close by had been the seat of the Culdees, another had been the prison-house of Mary, and in the cleft of the hills John Knox had preached and dispensed the sacrament. The time also was full of room for thought. It was shaking with the heave of the Revolution; the rumours of Jacobite plots filled the air; William III. had just died; Anne reigned in his stead, to the great joy of the High Church party; and the hope was strong of first depriving the Presbyterian Church of its freedom, and then of replacing it by the Church of the Charleses and Jameses. Carstares, the father of the Revolution Settlement, had left London when he could be no longer useful, and came down to Edinburgh in this year, 1703, to preside over an Assembly full of alarms and forebodings. These things could not fail to exercise the mind of Ebenezer Erskine, and help to form his views, but the result came out afterwards.

At first he seems to have been occupied chiefly with his ministerial work, and to have felt considerable difficulty in it. His settlement took place heartily in accordance with the law of the time, which was a

call from the heritors and elders, with the concurrence of the parishioners, corresponding to the state of things which Dr Chalmers wished to restore by his celebrated *Veto Act*. But, though the concurrence was given, there appears to have been little active interest. His sermons were committed closely to memory, and repeated, for reading was then out of the question. Yet, from the fault either of his memory or feeling, he had such difficulty in preserving his line of thought, that, unless he kept his eye fixed on a particular stone in the wall opposite, he was in terror lest he should break down. But, by degrees, freedom and warmth came to him, and so perceptibly, that the hearers experienced a new impression. The reason of the change was in his own spirit. Always sincere and earnest, he had yet known God's truth more with the convincement of the understanding, than the realisation of the heart; and a natural consequence was, that its freeness and fulness, as it gathers round Christ, were not clear to him. He had married a woman of great intelligence and spirituality, Alison Turpie, who fell into a depressed state of mind. In dealing with this he was led to more distinct views of the Gospel, and her remarkable character became a stimulating influence in his life. His memory was quickened and flooded by his heart, and his constrained manner changed into ease and vigour. He had the external advantages of a public speaker

in his appearance and voice, and native dignity of bearing; but the new power of his preaching lay in the conviction he had gained of evangelical truth, and in the central place he gave it in his message. His own people were roused to unwonted attention. Note-taking became a prevalent practice, and he sought to guide them in it, by the way in which he arranged and announced his plan of discourses. The praise of the Church took wing with such fervour, that one of the narrators says,—"Never can I hear such delightful melody till I get to heaven." A Thursday lecture was commenced, for which masters and servants prepared their affairs so as to be present; and large audiences attended the diets of examination, which were schools of theology for the people, and the absence of which has not found any proper compensation in our times. If, in some free way, there could be still the "hearing and asking questions," which has so high an ancestry, it might help to repair the broken religious knowledge of the Christian Church. Bible instruction, as much as spiritual impression, is a want of the day, and the one cannot be powerful without the other. By all these means there was a revival of the most healthful kind in the parish of Portmoak, and it spread to the districts round about. There were certain centres to which the people of Scotland, at that time, gathered to attend the sacraments, and Ebenezer Erskine's parish

became one of them. They came flocking in thousands, some of them from a distance of sixty miles. We can now form little idea (at least, we in the south of Scotland) of these great occasions, to which they looked forward, as the ancient Israelites did to their seasons of pilgrimage, and for which the people of the places visited made preparation in their houses and "meal girnels," against the inflow of sojourners. No doubt they became subject to abuse in the decline of religious feeling at the close of the last century; but, at an earlier period, they were seasons of special quickening and ingathering to the churches. There are few finer things than the description given by Blackadder of one of these open-air assemblies in the Merse, in the time of persecution, when 3,200 communicated; and, for the light it throws even on later times, we shall quote a portion of it.

"They had to place picquets of horsemen towards the suspected parts, and single horsemen at greater distances, to give warning, for the Earl of Hume, as ramp a youth as any in the country, had threatened to assault the meeting with his men and militia, and to make their horses drink the communion wine and trample the sacred elements under foot." "Every means," Blackadder continues, "was taken to compose the multitude, and prevent any affront that might be offered to so solemn and sacred a work, when they had to stay three days together, sojourning, *by the*

lions' dens and the mountains of the leopards. . . The place where we convened seemed to have been formed on purpose. It was a green and pleasant haugh, fast by the water side (the Whitadder). On either hand there was a spacious brae, in form of a half-round, covered with delightful pasture, and rising with a gentle slope to a goodly height. Above us was the clear blue sky, for it was a sweet and calm Sabbath morning, promising to be indeed one of the days of the Son of Man. There was a solemnity in the place befitting the occasion, and elevating the whole soul to a pure and holy frame. The communion tables were spread on the green by the water, and around them the people had arranged themselves in decent order. But the far greater multitude sat on the brae-face, which was crowded from top to bottom, full as pleasant a sight as was ever seen of that sort. At first there was some apprehension from enemies; but the people sat undisturbed, and the whole was closed in as orderly a way as it had been in the time of Scotland's brightest noon. And, truly, the spectacle of so many grave, composed, and devout faces, must have struck the adversaries with awe, and been more formidable than any outward ability of fierce looks and warlike array. We desired not the countenance of earthly kings; there was a spiritual and divine majesty shining on the work, and sensible evidence that the Great Master of assemblies was present in

the midst. Though our vows were not offered within the courts of God's house, they wanted not sincerity of heart, which is better than the reverence of sanctuaries. Amidst the lonely mountains we remembered the words of our Lord, that true worship was not peculiar to Jerusalem or Samaria; that the beauty of holiness consisted not in consecrated buildings, or material temples. We remembered the ark of the Israelites, which had sojourned for years in the desert, with no dwelling-place but the tabernacles of the plain. We thought of Abraham and the ancient patriarchs, who laid their victims on the rocks for an altar, and burned sweet incense under the shade of the green tree. In that day Zion put on the beauty of Sharon and Carmel; the mountains broke forth into singing, and the desert place was made to bud and blossom as the rose. Few such days were seen in the desolate Church of Scotland, and few will ever witness the like. There was a rich and plentiful effusion of the Spirit shed abroad on many hearts. Their souls, filled with heavenly transports, seemed to breathe in a diviner element, and to burn upwards, as with the fire of a pure and holy devotion. The ministers were visibly assisted to speak home to the conscience of the hearers. It seemed as if God had touched their lips with a live coal from off His altar, for they who witnessed declared they carried more like ambassadors from the court of heaven, than men

cast in earthly mould. The communion was peaceably concluded, all the people heartily offering up their gratitude, and singing with a joyful noise to the Rock of their salvation. It was pleasant, as the night fell, to hear their melody swelling in full unison along the hill, the whole congregation joining with one accord, and praising God with the voice of psalms."

We have given these extracts at greater length, that the spirit of these gatherings may be understood, so calm in the face of hills and sky, and yet so deep and fervid; and that it may be seen by what means the love of the Gospel was preserved in so many hearts amid the persecution of the seventeenth century, and the coldness of the eighteenth. More than a century after this communion in the Merse, Dr Waugh, speaking of those of the Secession, held in a place not far distant, says that "an angel might have lingered on his errand of mercy, to hear the Gospel preached on Stitchel brae."

Year after year, to the number of nearly thirty, such occasions took place at Portmoak, and by their means, and his presence at other places, Ebenezer Erskine exercised an influence not to be measured in any way by the quiet spot where he lived. In his diary, in 1714, he speaks of a Sabbath before the sacrament, when already, in expectation of the event, there was a great company of people assembled, so that he was obliged to preach in the open field. "I

was," he says, "under great fear as to my through bearing in the work of the day, before I went forth to public worship, which put me to my kness. But the Lord was pleased graciously to hear and pity, for I never rememember that I had more freedom in my life than this day in delivering my Master's message. The Lord gave me a composure of mind, and suggested many things to me in speaking, which I had not so much as thought on before. The people heard with a great deal of greediness and attention, so as if they would have drawn the word out of me. I have heard, since the sermon was over, that some were made to go home with vehement longings after Christ." He remained in Portmoak till the year 1731, notwithstanding several strong attempts to remove him to larger spheres. During all this time his name was becoming more widely known, and his influence was increasing. His character had also deepened through severe family afflictions. Child after child was taken, and his wife in 1720. The intercourse between him and his brother Ralph is, at this time, of a peculiarly touching kind, and his manner of thought and speech may be learned by an extract from a letter in the midst of these trials.

"How sweet a balance may it be to our spirits under the loss of such dear relations, to think of the heartsome work they are employed in, the heartsome company they are joined to, and the lightsome

house of many mansions wherein they dwell, not as passengers, but as pillars that shall go no more out. Let us *up with our drooping hearts;* for the same chariot that carried our worthy friends to glory, where they walk with Christ in white, will speedily return to fetch us also; and though they and we drop the mantle of the body in the passage, yet we shall receive it again with advantage in the morning of the resurrection, when these vile bodies shall be made like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus."

In 1731 he received a call to Stirling, to the Church which had been occupied by James Guthrie, one of the most courageous ministers of his time, and the first of those who suffered martyrdom after the Restoration of Charles II. The call was left to the decision of the Presbytery, and he was sent to Stirling. So strong was the attachment of his people at Portmoak, that some of them removed their residence to enjoy a continuance of his ministry. His entrance on his new work promised a large increase of usefulness, but it was to be in another way than was anticipated; and the training in trial and obscurity was to be, in the language of the prophet, "a hiding in the shadow of God's hand, to make him a polished shaft." In order to see how this came about, we must look back.

John Livingstone, in his interesting letters, tells of an old Covenanter who was so vexed by the appearance of declension after the great year of 1638, that

he said, "I think that the Church of Scotland is just like Adam in Paradise, that cannot continue in integrity a moment." It is probably as true of other churches as of the Church of Scotland, and it is some ground of consolation that times of declension have always had their witnesses, and also their revivals. It might have been thought that, after the heavy hand of persecution was removed, in 1688, there would have been a long and happy period of religious progress. But it was not so, and there were causes for it. At the restoration of Charles II., four hundred of the most devoted ministers were expelled from their charges, and their places supplied by a time-serving, ignorant, and often immoral class of clergy. This character is given to them by men who were not their opponents. Worthy men remained among "the indulged," but they were compromised by their position, and unable, or afraid, to take a decided stand. For twenty-eight long years, the withering curse of an inefficient clergy lay on a great part of Scotland, and a whole generation grew up under it; for though the Gospel was faithfully preached on the hills and the scaffolds, it only reached a limited number. When the Revolution came, only sixty of the ejected ministers remained; and those who had filled the vacant charges were most of them willing to retain place and pay by compliance. It is a question whether some parts of

Scotland ever recovered fully the blight of that time, and it has been felt most where the faithfulness of the Covenant men left the greatest number of empty pulpits. In consequence of this, the old struggle of the seventeenth century had to be renewed in the eighteenth, with this favourable difference, that the Revolution had brought religious liberty, and that any persecution was more social than political.

There were two questions that rose as the testing ones of the day, and that touched the old principles which are debated in every age under different forms —truth and freedom. These two questions gave the public life of the Erskines and their friends that meaning which they have for us. Let us glance at them. The question of truth was raised in the case of one Professor Simson, of Glasgow, in 1714, whose teaching, as far as it can be understood through his dim language, was of an Arian kind, and who claimed to have the sympathy of "the enlightened members of the Assembly." With him there was Professor Campbell, of St Andrews, who, in defending the Apostles from what was beginning to be esteemed the odious charge of enthusiasm, denounced such expressions as "consulting the throne of grace," "laying their matters before the Lord, and imploring His light and direction," as "terms of art much used by enthusiasts." Views entertained by him, that were admitted to strike at the root of revealed religion, were condoned

after some loose explanations. Protests against this laxity form part of the struggle of the time. But it took another shape, which had more lasting effects. One day, Thomas Boston, when visiting in the house of one of his people at Simprin, found a little old book above the window-head, which he took down and began to read. It was a book that has become famous in Scotland, the "Marrow of Modern Divinity." It had been brought from England, many years before, in the knapsack of a soldier who had fought in the Commonwealth wars, and it had lain, like a hidden seed, in that quiet corner. The book had been written, or rather compiled, by one Edward Fisher, the son of an English knight, and a Master of Arts of Oxford. It gave, in the form of a dialogue, the opinions of the leading Reformers, Luther and Calvin, and of such English divines as Hall and Hooker, on the doctrines of grace and the offer of the Gospel. The object of the book was to clear away the barriers which are so often raised between the sinner and Christ, in the shape of certain conditions,—such as repentance or some degree of outward or inward reformation,—and to present Him immediately with the words, "Whosoever will, let him come," assured that, in heartily receiving Christ, full repentance and a new life will follow. The system of Neonomianism, as it was called, which changed the Gospel into a modified and easier kind of law, had grown up in

Scotland, as elsewhere, and this little book became the instrument of a revival of clearer and fuller Gospel preaching. It did what the discovery of Luther on the Galatians, in the house of a country schoolmaster, has done for Sweden of late years, or, to use a Scripture figure, what the bones of Elisha did for the body of the man cast into his sepulchre, when "he revived and stood up on his feet." Such remarkable instances of the vitality of truth over the graves of prophets and preachers, occur ever and again in the history of the Church. Boston tells us that he "rejoiced in the book as a light which the Lord had seasonably struck up to him in his darkness, that he digested its doctrine and began to preach it." Through him it found its way into the hands of James Hog, of Carnock, who republished it with a recommendation, in 1717. It attracted the attention of a number in the Assembly, and especially of Principal Haddow, of St Andrews, who instituted a prosecution against its friends as guilty of Antinomian errors. After much controversy, twelve ministers who held to the views so stigmatised, were condemned to be rebuked and admonished at the bar, and narrowly escaped deposition. The whole discussion was finding its counterpart at the same time in Germany, in the prosecution of the Pietists, Spener and Francke, by the cold, formal orthodoxy of the period; for the tides of Church life in different countries have always

a connection. It was a tendency to exalt the moral side of the Bible at the expense of the evangelical, which led to a system of naturalism, and in the end deprived morality itself of the deep meaning and motives that distinguish Christianity from a rationalised paganism. Looked at from our time, the anti-evangelical growth within the Scottish Church was part of that wide movement which produced the latitudinarianism of the Church of England, weakened the spirit of Nonconformity, brought down the old Presbyterianism of the Puritans, first to Pelagianism, and then to Socinianism, and in Germany led to the long reign of Rationalism which Pietism retarded, but did not prevent. The importance of this survey to our sketch, will be seen in the fact that Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine were prominent supporters of the "Marrow" theology, that Ebenezer drew up the representation of its principles which was condemned by the Assembly, and that the view of the Gospel contained in it was the basis of the Secession preaching, as it has been of the clear and unfettered offer of Christ in great seasons of quickening ever since.

After the question of truth, we come to that of freedom, which has a closer connection with it than may be at first apparent. Certainly in Scotland it is the friends of evangelical doctrine who have always shewn themselves the friends of the freedom of the Christian people. At the Revolution, the choice of

the minister was granted to the congregation, though it must be confessed, in an imperfect way. In 1712, lay patronage was introduced in a bill hurriedly carried through the British Parliament by the intrigues of the High Church and Jacobite party. It was in direct opposition to the Treaty of Union, and the whole procedure was treacherous in motive and manner. At first there was a yearly remonstrance by the Assembly against it, but it ceased as doctrinal defection set in; and ministers began to be forced, under various pretexts, upon unwilling churches. At last, in 1731, an enactment was passed by which, in cases where the patron declined to present, the choice of the minister was given to a majority of the heritors and elders being Protestants, without regard to the will of the congregation in any way. In many cases, this put the choice of the minister in the hands of the Jacobites and High Church Episcopalians; yet the Assembly passed it summarily, in violation of the Barrier Act, and refused to hear or heed the protests lodged against it. During all this time the evangelical party had been maintaining a weary batile for popular rights, in the face of an increasing majority, and now the door was closed against remonstrance. It is always a dangerous act to shut a safety valve, but a change was coming over the spirit of the times. Old Wodrow, who had written the history of the high-handed persecution of the last century, describes,

in a melancholy tone, the flippancy of habits, and superficial religious training of the ministry of his time, and predicts the evil that is impending from a new quarter. Thomas Boston of Ettrick died just after this Act was put in force, and he finishes his memoirs in sadness, and yet in hope. "I bless my God in Jesus Christ, that ever He made me a Christian, and took an early dealing with my soul; that ever He made me a minister of the Gospel, and gave me some insight into His grace. The world hath all along been a step-dame to me, and wheresoever I would have attempted to nestle in it, there was a thorn of uneasiness laid for me. Man is born crying, lives complaining, and dies disappointed from that quarter. I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!"

Boston died on the 20th of May, and in that same year, October 10th, 1732, it fell to Ebenezer Erskine, as moderator, to preach the opening sermon of the Synod of Perth and Stirling. It is another illustration of a living witness being always ready to take the place of the dead. The text he chose was Psalm cxviii. 22, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." There is no distinguished power of intellect in the sermon; the preacher evidently made no effort to reach it. In a plain and fearless way, but without any personalities, he sets forth the defections of the time, claims for Christ that Headship in the Church which belongs

to Him, and for the people that liberty which is their birthright under His rule. The outspoken honesty of the sermon gave great offence to a number in the Synod, and he was sentenced to be rebuked and admonished. He appealed to the Assembly, and, at its meeting in May 1733, the conduct of the Synod was sustained, and rebuke and admonition again imposed on him. He and three others, William Wilson of Perth, Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, and James Fisher of Kinclaven, offered a protest, which, if received, would have relieved conscience, and probably settled the matter for the time. It was refused, but was left lying on the table, or rather accidentally fell from it, and was unheeded, till a fiery member of the Court picked it up and read it. Its contents were simply a claim, in respectful terms, to adhere to the testimony already given, but the reading of it set the Assembly in a flame. The protesters were recalled, ordered to disown it, and, on declaring that they could not, they were handed over to the Commission, with a charge that, if they persisted, they should be suspended from office, and, if still unrepentant, visited with a yet higher censure. The case now went on its way. When the Commission met, they refused to withdraw their protest, and were first suspended, and then loosed from the congregations where they ministered. The ordeal was a very trying one, for they were compelled to plead apart, and subjected to the strongest

urgency, threatened by opponents, and besought by friends who sympathised with them. But the question was one of conscience, and they knew that if they yielded they would be silenced. There is a tradition in South Queensferry that, when Ebenezer Erskine was on his way home to Stirling from the Commission, he stopped to assist at the Communion of his friend James Kidd of Queensferry, who was one of the Marrowmen, and who, though he did not join Erskine, always continued his warm friend. The first Psalm given out by the silenced minister was—

> "My closed lips, O Lord, by Thee
> Let them be opened;
> Then shall Thy praises by my mouth
> Abroad be published."

The people at once saw and felt the reference, and the words in due time found their fulfilment. He seems to have had a curious felicity in the selection of his psalms, of which another instance has come down. While there was a strong current of feeling through Scotland in favour of the Seceders, there was also a keen counter current that made itself both felt and seen. On one occasion, when he was about to preach at a neighbouring town, the opposition was so strong that there was a resolve he should not be heard, and a mob, with frowning looks, waited his appearance. But he was one of those who did not regard "the com-

pany of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls of the people," any more than he did unjust authority. His calm dignified look cleared a way for him, and he gave out the psalm:

> "Against me though an host encamp,
> My heart yet fearless is."

On December 5, 1733, the four brethren met at Gairney Bridge, near Kinross; and there, after solemn prayer and counsel, the first Associate Presbytery was formed. It was the fountain head of the Secession Church, which, united with the Relief, numbers above five hundred congregations in Scotland, has sent large detachments to England, Ireland, the Colonies, and the United States, and has its missions in the four quarters of the world. Before, however, any decided step was taken, an effort was made by the Established Church to recall them to its fold. The mistake which had been committed was seen, and the majority, which had carried matters with so high a hand, stood aside to let the minority hold out the olive branch. The four suspended ministers were released from their sentence, some obnoxious steps were recalled, and Ebenezer Erskine was chosen Moderator of the Presbytery of Stirling. But, after lengthened deliberation, they declined to go back; and the Assembly, having waited for some time, finally and formally deposed them from the ministry in 1740. This refusal on their part was a great disappointment and grief to their friends in

the Establishment, and it has been often blamed since by evangelical ministers of the Church of Scotland who admired their first stand, and sympathised with their principles. It has been said that, if they had carried their zeal, and the weight of their character, to the help of the evangelical minority who were struggling within the Church, the defection might have been stayed, the long reign of Moderatism prevented, and, it may be, the Disruption averted, by a "*free reformed Church of Scotland in union with the State.*" We shall not here discuss the question whether such a vision could ever become a reality; or, if it could, whether it would be desirable—we shall look at it in a way that requires less controversy. And first, I think, it will be granted by fair-minded men, that it was not pride or vindictive feeling that influenced them in their refusal. The personal wrong they had sustained was repaired, and honour unasked offered to their leader. They had ties of friendship in the Church that remained unbroken to the last, and they had in many respects a doubtful prospect, in going forth, as they largely did, as pioneers into an untried land. They must have refused from what they believed to be best for the Christian cause in Scotland, and, if there was feeling, it must have been Christian feeling, as opposed to the selfishly personal. Did they, then, err through a mistaken judgment? On the contrary, we believe they measured correctly the spirit of the

time, and chose wisely the best way of counteracting it. They were aware that the Moderate party had not changed their views, but were merely holding their hand, and biding their time, for prudential reasons. This was very soon proved by the course things took. They knew that the root of the evil, in the action of the Government to the Church, was still there, and its removal meanwhile was beyond their power. They were called to a great work of evangelisation in Scotland, and there was a tide of sympathy among masses of the people ready to bear them on. They could meet this only in the path of freedom, unhampered by ecclesiastical limits and restrictions; and, if they neglected it, there was much doubt if it would rise again. The centuries belong to those who know how to seize the hours. Had they re-entered the Church, and felt themselves compelled again to leave, it would have been to meet hesitation and chill of feeling among the people. The question then was, whether more could be done by a few additional evangelicals within the Church, protesting and working under constant constraint, or by a compact body outside, free to move through the whole of Scotland, and to meet that longing for the Gospel which prevailed in so many hearts. There are two cases that throw some light on the question. The one is in Germany, where the corresponding movement of Spener and Francke died away under the advancing march of Rationalism;

when, so far as we can see, the history of the Protestant Church in that country might have been a very different one, if it had possessed a free Evangelical Church that could have appealed to the people before they were drugged into indifference. The dread of breaking uniformity has been well nigh the ruin of life and unity. The other case is nearer to us. Who can think that John Wesley and his friends would have done so much for the cause of Christ in England, and throughout the world, if they had been persuaded to take the step they were once inclined to, and had remained in the Anglican Church? Long since, the ripples would have closed over their movement, instead of those currents that are finding their way to the ends of the earth. Far from the Secession of the Erskines retarding the return of evangelical life in Scotland, we believe it was this, above all, which helped to preserve it in the National Church and which stimulated its revival. Had they gone back, it might have prevented the Disruption, but it might have done it at the hazard of something like decay and death. No one can suppose that the forecast of these issues was in the minds of the men who had to make their choice; but there are inward impulses which in God's hand are in the place of eyes, and there is a breath of freedom on the face which tells the way from prison-houses in the dark. It is one thing to keep men in, even with a good conscience, and another to bring them

back. The early spring may hold the buds in bonds, folded and reconciled to their constraint; but, when they have broken into flower, they cannot be charmed into their old places, for they know that summer is nigh. And when God breathes on His garden, there are spring-times of expansion which lead into the future by a way which men know not. At such seasons witnesses like Luther, and Knox, and Whitefield, and Chalmers hear the cry, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain: lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." But to answer it, they must hear that other word, "Shake thyself from the dust: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion!" That the Erskines heard that voice, we, for our part, cannot doubt.

On the first Sabbath after his deposition, 1740, Ebenezer Erskine found the doors of the church and of the churchyard made fast against him by the civil authorities, at the instance of the Assembly. With the pulpit Bible in his hands, which it was then the custom to bring from the manse, and surrounded by an immense multitude, he moved to a place still pointed out, on the height, just below the ramparts of Stirling Castle, and there held his first service. It is a spot full of wonderful interest to the eye and memory. The precipitous range of the Ochils runs from the edge of the Forth, like a huge barbican, with the deep

fosse of Menteith behind it, and beyond, like an inner wall, the Grampian range, with the outstanding battlements of Ben Ledi and Ben Lomond, the fastnesses of freedom from the days of the Romans. Seven noted battle-fields can be counted from the rock above; on the one side, Stirling Bridge, where Wallace gained the victory which made the final conquest of Scotland impossible, and on the other, the field of Bannockburn, which secured final independence—the two stages in all great conflicts, endurance and triumph.

It is not out of keeping to connect the spiritual struggle with these national conflicts. They are links in one chain, and they rise in value as time goes on, reminding us of the promise, "for brass I will bring gold!"

There is another coincidence worth notice that comes nearer. Eighty years past, in 1660, James Guthrie, one of the most illustrious of our Scottish martyrs, had preached his last sermon in Stirling, not long before his execution. His head was exposed for twenty-seven years on the Netherbow port of Edinburgh, till Alexander Hamilton, a youth at College, took it down under peril of his life. Many years afterwards, Alexander Hamilton was called to occupy the pulpit and manse of James Guthrie. Examining a closet, he lighted upon some old papers that had lain there, he knew not how long, and among them he discovered the manuscript of Guthrie's last sermon,

in his own hand. Ebenezer Erskine came to be Hamilton's colleague, and, hearing of the sermon, got his consent to publish it. All this is related at length in the preface, and the subject is given—"*A sermon preached at Stirling by Mr James Guthrie, on the Sabbath-day, in the forenoon, upon the 19th day of August, 1660, upon the 22. verse of the 14. chapter of Matthew. He did also read the 23 and 24 verses of the same chapter; but had not occasion to preach any more: he being imprisoned the Thursday thereafter.*" The text of Guthrie's sermon, thus interrupted, was, "And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away." Now the text of the first sermon which Ebenezer Erskine preached beneath the ramparts of Stirling, after his deposition, was Matt. viii. 27, "But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" There can be little doubt that, while Erskine avoided Guthrie's text, he sought one kindred to it, and thereby intimated his desire to take up the old line of witness-bearing. It deserves to be noted, that most, if not all, of the early fathers of the movement, sprang from the ancestry that had suffered in the persecuting time. The first psalm given out was the noble 60th, which passes through all the moods of dismay and confidence, prayer and praise.

"O Lord Thou hast rejected us,
And scattered us abroad;
Thou justly hast displeased been:
Return to us, O God.

. . . . . .

"And yet a banner Thou hast given
To them who Thee do fear;
That it by them, because of truth,
Displayed may appear.

"That Thy beloved people may
Delivered be from thrall,
Save with the power of Thy right hand,
And hear me when I call."*

It is natural to pass at this part of the sketch to the other brother, and the notice may be more brief, as it does not need to deal with the public matters already related. Some have fancifully thought Ebenezer got his name, "the stone of help," from the Bass rock, to the prison of which his father had been sentenced, but not committed. It is much more likely it was the expression of faith in the midst of the dark time round his birth. Ralph got his name in Northumberland, where it is a common name from the time of the warlike Percies, and he owed it pro-

* One thing more may be noted, that the venerable Dr Hay of Kinross, as Moderator, gave the same psalm to be sung at the union of the Secession and Relief churches in 1847, and thus commenced with it the history of the United Presbyterian Church.

bably to some friend of his father's. He was born at Monilaws, within the English border, in 1685, and was thus five years younger than his brother. He studied and took his degree at Edinburgh, was licensed to preach in 1707, and settled in the collegiate charge of Dunfermline, where he spent all the rest of his life, first as a minister of the Established, and then of the Secession Church. Dunfermline, like Stirling, has its old associations with the history of Scotland. Its romantic dell, and the eminence overhanging it, made it the favourite residence of our early kings. It was a centre of civilising and Christian influence, when Edinburgh was a rude fortress, looking down on woods and marshes. Malcolm Canmore and the good Queen Margaret founded its once beautiful Abbey, ruined by Edward I. There they sleep together, and the long line of their children; and there, too, rests Robert Bruce, his queen, and his nephew, the gallant Randolph. It was the birthplace also of monarchs, of the unfortunate Charles I., and of his sister, the accomplished and pious Elizabeth of Bohemia, herself discrowned, but the mother of our present race of kings. So much "gentle kin" could scarcely be without its influence, and the people of Dunfermline and its neighbourhood have long been noted for their intelligence and public spirit. The town has now grown to large proportions; but, even in Ralph Erskine's ministry, he speaks of having upwards of 5000 exam-

inable persons in the congregation. With his colleague, Mr James Wardlaw, he visited and examined all the people once a year. He preached not only on Sabbaths, but throughout the week, and had weekly diets of catechising for the young. His note-books show that he had anticipated much of what we think is modern, and contain his questions and lines of instruction for the children. They bear evidence of his care to improve himself in study and reading, lists of his favourite authors, theological and philosophical, arrangements of texts for all varieties of subjects, digests of books of the Bible, large portions of which he committed to memory, and an abridgment of Hebrew grammar for his acquaintance with the original. There are expressions of regret at frequent interruptions which compelled him to persist in reading and writing till midnight, and sometimes till three or four in the morning. All through, there breathes the most devout and prayerful spirit.

Ralph, as well as Ebenezer, took a deep interest in all the controversies of the time, and he stood by his elder brother's side, though with an independent judgment. He was present at Gairneybridge in 1733, as a witness of the formation of the Presbytery there, but did not join it till 1737, and was deposed along with the others, in 1740. His delay arose from the hope of seeing a better spirit and some attempt at reformation in the Church, but, disappointed in this,

he threw in his lot with the Seceding brethren. He had not a little struggle in carrying out his determination, for his colleague, a worthy Christian man, was strongly opposed, and a number of the elders were in doubt; but at last the great majority of them, and of the people, supported him in his resolution. The communions at Dunfermline had already been noted seasons, and now they were attended by still greater numbers. There is a notice of one of them in his journal, shortly after he joined the Secession.

"Sabbath, July 10th 1737.—The Sacrament was in Dunfermline; and I preached half-an-hour before the action (service) began, about half before eight in the morning, upon Matt. iii. 17. The tables began to be served a little after nine, and continued till about twelve at night, there being between four and five thousand communicants. Ministers were well helped, and many people heartened."

It may be interesting, and helpful to the understanding of the time, to give the introduction to one of Ralph Erskine's sermons on a previous occasion. The text is Isaiah xlii. 6,—"*I will give Thee for a covenant of the people.*" The sermon, or rather series of sermons, is in a style very different from that of our day, but there is a quaint realism about it, an evangelical glow, and a constant contact with the hearts of the hearers that accounts for his great popularity as a preacher.

My dear Friends, if your ears be open, there are three things that you may hear this day. 1st, You may hear what ministers will say; but that is a matter of small moment, and it is but a poor errand, if you be only come to hear what a poor, mortal, sinful fellow-creature will say to you. Little matter what we say, if God Himself do not speak into your hearts. Therefore, 2nd, You may hear what God says to you—this is a matter of great moment, for God's speaking can make us both hear and live, though we were as deaf as stocks, and as dead as stones. He spake the old Creation out of nothing, and he can speak a new creation out of us, who are worse than nothing. Indeed, it will be a wonder if he do not speak terrible things in righteousness unto us, because of our sins; and really if he speak to us out of Christ, it will be dreadful. Therefore, 3rd, You may come to hear what God says to Christ, and this is of the greatest moment of all. To hear what ministers say to the congregation is a little thing; to hear what God says to you is a great thing. But to hear what God says to Christ, is one of the greatest things that can be heard. God in His Word speaks to the sons of men, and perhaps you have noticed that; but He speaks also to the Son of God, to his Eternal Son; and perhaps that is what you have little noticed to this day. Why, what says He to Christ? Is it anything that we, the people, are concerned with? Yea, what he says to Christ is of the greatest concern to us, and it is this, *I will give Thee for a covenant of the people.* O, might the great and eternal Father, say to his great and eternal Son, who is one God with Him and the eternal Spirit, Yonder is a company of people meeting in *Dunfermline* about a communion table, with a view to the sealing of the Covenant; but their work will be to little purpose if they view not Thee, my beloved Son, to be the spring, the spirit, the life, the all of the Covenant. Their Covenant will be but a poor bargain without Thee; and, therefore, *behold, I will give* THEE *for a covenant of the people!* O, a sweet saying as ever was said in the world! and no wonder, for 'tis a part of a sermon whereof God Himself is the preacher, and Christ is the text, and the Spirit is the voice that conveys it."

There is throughout the sermon the same boldness of appeal, with deep reverence in the heart of it, touches of pathos, and a lively fancy steeped in Bible language and illustration, which show how, in the

movements of his day, he was such a quickening and persuading preacher.

His character differed considerably from that of his brother. Some one said of Ebenezer that to hear him was "to listen to the Gospel presented in its majesty;" and he excelled in strength and leading power. But Ralph had more of the orator, and of that subtlety of thought and fervour of emotion which met so remarkably in Samuel Rutherford. In general literature, too, he was far in advance of most of the ministers of his time, and there was, according to tradition, a humanism in his recreations that stumbled the more rigid, but attracted to him the mass of the people. The story of his practice on the "wee sinful fiddle" is so well known that we do not repeat it, but there is another, shewing the warmth of attachment to Ralph and his preaching, which, so far as we are aware, has never been in type. At West Linton, which was one of the early headquarters of the Secession south of the Forth, there was a gathering of thousands to a sacrament, and the two brothers were present. The communion took place in the open air, on a beautiful green, beside the little river Lyne. After the services, the ministers, in order to reach the manse, had to cross the stream on stepping-stones. A countryman from the far north had been so delighted and edified by Ralph's preaching, that, to have a few words with him, he marched through the Lyne, step for step,

beside him, with the water nearly to his knees. Pulling out a large Highland snuff-horn, he put it in his hand, with the words, "O sir, take a pinch, it will do you meikle good." Ralph readily complied, and on his returning the horn, the worthy man, not knowing how to shew his feeling, refused it, saying "O sir, keep it, it will do me meikle good." On telling the story, and showing the gift at the manse dinner, his brother said, "Ralph, Ralph, ye hae blawn best, ye've brought away the horn," with a reference to the legend of the knight in the old tale of chivalry. It is a simple story, but it brings the two brothers near us, and lets us see how the time imprinted the little incidents on the memories of the people.

When, after his deposition, Ralph Erskine could no longer preach in the Parish Church, a new place of worship needed to be built. He records, with great thankfulness, that "at least, *four hundred pounds sterling* will be gathered in the parish, among the poorer sort, for the most part; and many that have given declared that, in case of need, they will give as much again." It was a large sum for those days at the current value of money, proving what Dr Chalmers called "the power of littles," and beginning a new revenue in the Christian Church, that has gone on extending ever since among all denominations. A large building was soon raised, capable of containing two thousand people, and here he preached till his

death. His difficulty, however, was to abide long by it. His journals, and those of his fellow ministers, are at this time filled with notes of their travels through all the middle and south of Scotland, in nearly every case in response to invitations, and with accounts of sermons preached to hundreds and thousands of the assembled people. They had, in one year, applications for supply of regular preaching from seventy different societies, and could never have met a tenth of the calls, had it not been for the aid of the elders, who took their place when they were absent, and superintended the outlying districts. The higher tone thus given to the general body of the eldership was one of the indirect benefits that arose from the Secession. A "Seceder elder" was at first a sneer in the mouth of adversaries; but the part these men took has helped to restore this arm of strength to the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. The societies which called for preachers were, in numerous cases, fellowship meetings which had come down from the times of persecution, and they formed the centres out of which so many of the Reformed Presbyterian, Secession, and Relief Churches grew. The people, unable to find spiritual food under the dry, heartless preaching of the Moderate clergy, gathered themselves into little bands, and became what the prophet calls, "a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that waited not for the sons of men." But, with that love of stated

ordinances which has always marked the best portion of the Scottish people, as soon as Gospel preaching was supplied by a Christian ministry, they flocked to it. The Erskines and their successors did not begin their work a day too soon, and the more their history and the state of the time are studied, the more clear does it become, that a great opportunity would have been missed if they had not taken the step they did. One of their chief endeavours, and to this Ralph Erskine greatly contributed, was to train a young ministry, for which they wisely required a full preparatory education. He introduced their first licentiate to the two-fold charge of Gateshaw and Stitchel, in Roxburghshire. At Gateshaw, a site for building was denied them, and they had to meet for a considerable time in a sequestered hollow, through which a small burn runs to join the water of Kail. A tall old tower, called Corbet Tower, now draped in green ivy, seems to guard the entrance to a little amphitheatre where the communions were long held after they had secured a church; and, from the south of Scotland and the north of England, thousands convened to Gateshaw Brae. The first minister, John Hunter, inducted by Ralph Erskine, was a young man of remarkable promise for talent, piety, and zeal, and was compared by his friends to Samuel Rutherford; but, to the great grief of the infant denomination, he died in less than three months after his settlement. Prin-

cipal Robertson, the historian, when a youth, went to one of the gatherings in East Lothian where Hunter preached, and years afterwards he spoke of the sermon. "He addressed his audience," he says, "in a strain of natural and profound eloquence, and a strong impression was produced. I myself was deeply affected, as well as those around me; and such was the effect, that I recollected more of that sermon than of any I have ever heard. Even yet, when I retire to my studies, the recollection thrills through my mind." The story is told, that an opponent of the Secession remarked to one of its adherents that, "God appeared to frown on the cause, since he had taken away their first licentiate, a man of such gifts." "No," was the reply, "when God long ago claimed the first fruits, it brought a blessing on the harvest, and so will it be with the preachers of the Secession Church."

In speaking of the influence of both the Erskines, but especially of Ralph, we must not forget their writings. When collected, they form many goodly volumes, but they were thrown off, for the most part, in single sermons and pamphlets, published in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and other towns, and were scattered over Scotland. One might find them in almost every farmhouse and cottage where there was an interest in religion. They can by no means rank with the great Puritan theology of the previous century, but

they were suited to their time. They were highly valued by the evangelical ministers in England, both Episcopal and Nonconformist, crossed the sea to America, and were translated into the tongues of Wales and Holland. On a market-day in Rotterdam, the farmers have often been heard inquiring at the bookstalls for *Erskeyna*. Not least among these have been the Gospel Sonnets of Ralph Erskine. They went through an immense number of editions in this country and America; and, in the homes of the pious peasantry, they took the place of the old minstrel literature. Perhaps we should say that in many hearts the two entered into a loving friendship, for real chivalry and Christianity are not so wide apart, and the love of country is never so dear as when it is put under the care of the love of God. The sonnets are full of curious riddles and rhymes, and have often, it must be confessed, more of sound theology than high poetry. They will no doubt displease the *friends of broad culture*, and are constructed for different organs than the refined senses of "sweetness and light." Those who care little for the ointment, but a great deal for the flies and the cleverness that picks them out, will rejoice to find exercise for their faculty. But there must be something of fragrance in a book that would make a man like Andrew Fuller say, "One day in particular, I took up Ralph Erskine's Gospel Sonnets, and opening

upon what he entitled '*A Gospel Catechism for young Christians, or Christ all in all, and our complete Redemption,*' I read, and as I read I wept. Indeed, I was almost overcome with weeping, so interesting did the doctrine of eternal salvation appear to me!" And there must have been fire in the heart that broke, while it mused, into verses like these, from

STRIFE IN HEAVEN.

"Babes thither caught from womb and breast
Claim right to sing above the rest,
Because they've found the happy shore
They neither saw nor sought before."

Or from

HEAVEN DESIRED BY SAINTS ON EARTH.

"Happy the company that's gone
From cross to crown, from thrall to throne;
How loud they sing upon the shore
To which they sailed in heart before!

"Death from all death has set us free,
And will our gain for ever be;
Death loosed the massy chain of wo,
To let the mournful captives go.

"Death is to us a sweet repose,
The bud was oped to shew the rose;
The cage was broke to let us fly,
And build our happy nest on high."

Having thus brought the brothers together into the same Church and work, we might go on to give

the remainder of their history; but we have touched on what was really the great labour of their life, and the ground why they must always have a place in Scottish Church records. To enter fully into the rest of their course would be to raise again questions that have been long since laid, and in which time has already separated the wheat from the chaff. Their dispute with George Whitefield, because he would not identify himself with their ecclesiastical position, is well known, and we have no hesitation in saying that he was more in the right than they were, and that if he preached the Gospel in Scotland, he could not have acted otherwise than he did. The excuse for them is, that they were heated with a conflict in which he had not shared, and that they attached an importance to the government and order of the Church which were foreign to his way of thinking. It may be that he thought too little of this, and that his immense labours have left less result, from the harvest not being garnered into sheaves. He looked at Christ above all as a Saviour; they regarded Him also as a King who has rights, of which they were very jealous. But, in any case, their spirit cannot be commended in the way they dealt by him, and still less in the uncharitable judgment they formed of the revivals at Kilsyth and Cambuslang. If they had been free from prejudice, they would have seen that the work there was really their own, and that it needed only an

extension of it to make the Church of Scotland what they desired, in its laws and discipline, as well as in its life.

It would not be so easy to pronounce upon the unhappy divisions that broke out among themselves regarding what is called the "Burgess oath." The fact that so many good men divided into two nearly equal parts, shows that it was a doubtful disputation. The fault lay first of all in the stumbling-block which the civil law put in the way of the religious conscience, and then in the temper with which they took it up—that over-hasty zeal for the house of God which devoured them, and which injured the house in the struggle to purify it. It needs a wise hand to overturn the tables of the money-changers without hurting the sacred vessels. If they were in some things narrow and intolerant, it is only saying that they were men who shared in the tone of their time, while, in their main aim and spirit, they rose above it. That they were charged with a mission to the Church, and to Scotland, is seen in this, that, notwithstanding faults they committed, their work went forward and bore large fruit. We can recollect no great spiritual movement which has not, after its first fresh burst of life, had its period of trial—of trial, even by fire. But if it be real, that is, if Christian faith be held fast, it will come out tried like gold from the furnace, the dross gone, the precious ore safe.

There is evidence that the views of both the brothers widened and mellowed on controverted points before they died. They never wavered in the principles and positions they took up; but, after the dust of battle was laid, they spoke kindly of those with whom they had differed. Ralph died on November 6th, 1752, and lies buried at Dunfermline. Owing to the nature of his illness, few of his dying words are preserved. George Whitefield, who must have heard it from friends, gives us one, and it is pleasant to have it through such a channel. It is as if we had a word from Paul about Barnabas, after their sharp contention. "Thus," he says, in one of his sermons on Isaiah lx. 19, where he gives the last expressions of several dying Christians, "thus died Mr Ralph Erskine—his last words were, 'Victory, victory, victory!'" Of Ebenezer's death we have a more detailed account. When he heard that his brother Ralph was dead, he said, with great feeling, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start of me; he was first in Christ, and now he is first in glory." His last public discourse was a short one, going from his bed to the pulpit, as the people were very urgent to see and hear him. His text was, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." His very last sermon was preached from his bed to a company in the room, when he baptised a child, and he chose a text with which he had particularly wished to finish his ministry, "This God is our God for ever

and ever; He will be our guide even unto death." He lay on the river's brink for a while, like one of Bunyan's pilgrims, and conversed calmly with his family and those about him, of the way he had come, and the place he was going to. "Though I die," he said to his children, "the Lord liveth. I have known more of God since I came to this bed, than through all my life;" and to some friends conversing with him, "I know that when my soul forsakes this tabernacle of clay it will fly as naturally to my Saviour's bosom as the bird to its nest." He was conscious nearly to the moment of his death, shut his eyes, laid his hand under his cheek, and went to sleep, June 2nd, 1754, having nearly completed the seventy-fourth year of his age.

By his own desire, he was buried in the centre of his church, opposite to the pulpit, where a stone covered the spot. In consequence of a new church having been built behind the site of the old one, his grave is now in the open space in front, with a monument erected to his memory.

It is scarcely necessary to add a word about the characters of these two brothers. It is written in their life and work. They had, as already said, individual differences, but they had more in common; and what was common belonged to the highest part of the nature, the moral and spiritual. They were

sincere to the inmost fibre of their conscience, and fearless in following out their convictions. Had they lived in the previous century, they would have been preachers on the hills, or sufferers at the Grassmarket. As it was, they stood up unshrinkingly against defection, and led on what must have seemed a forlorn hope. They went out, not knowing whither they went, with a faith in God's guidance that sent them forward, though they might have had opportunity to have returned. We do not forget, in this, men of the same character who preceded and who followed them; but to them it fell prominently to build up a testimony in the land, for a pure Gospel and a freely-chosen ministry. It was the wisdom, the sagacity, the zeal, and the devotion of the fathers of the Secession that originated the central body of the free Presbyterian Church of the last century, of which the Reformed Presbyterians were the one wing and the Relief the other. In the great temple of the Christian Church which is rising, there are memorials which we may cherish, without either idolatry or sectarianism; and to the Erskines belongs one of these. We do not worship, or call them Master, but we may be inspired by their example and spirit. We may confess, as we have already done, that the very keenness of their conscience led them, at times, into intolerance; and Thomas Gillespie, of the Relief Church, had a meeker spirit and wider views of Church communion, while

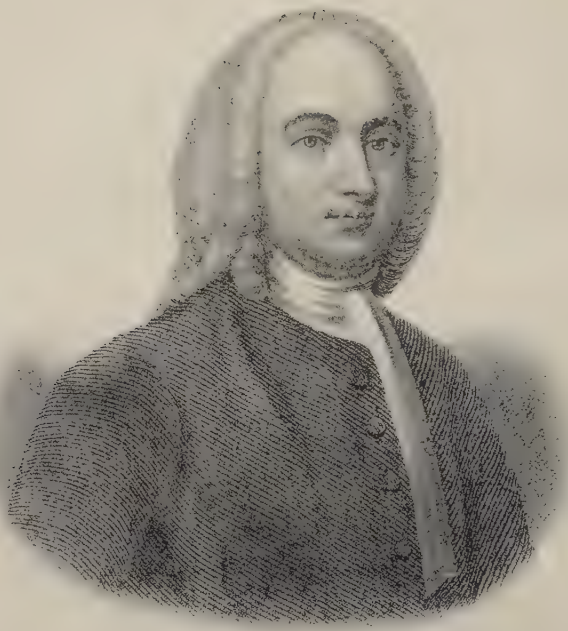
he was not less evangelical. But they helped to lay the foundation of true Christian breadth in contending for other principles. The first great succour to new views of religious freedom came from their demand for the place of the Christian people in the Church. When Ebenezer Erskine opposed a forced settlement at Burntisland, the noble patron of the parish invited the other members of the Presbytery to dinner, but left him out, with the words, "Mr Erskine, you are none of us to-day." "Sir," he replied, "you do me great honour; it gives me the truest pleasure that in this we are agreed; for I scorn to be one of those who dare to oppress the Christian people, and to rob them of their just privileges." It is this refusal to allow either State or clergy to lord it over God's heritage, that has drawn forth whatever of power there is in the Churches of Scotland, and that is to enlist more active work and ready giving when the people feel that the cause is their own. But the Erskines and their friends did even more by the character of their preaching. They valued freedom for the sake of truth, and the great truth which lay close to their heart and was always in their lips was, the freeness, fulness, and absolute sufficiency of Christ as a Saviour, to all and everyone who will receive Him. We cannot open any one of their sermons without seeing that this was the life of their own soul, and the spring of all their work. Such men as

Hervey, Toplady, Andrew Fuller, Dr John Erskine, Dr Andrew Thomson of St. George's, are a few of those who acknowledge their obligations to them. It was this that made their teaching so thoroughly evangelistic, and their work a missionary one, first to Scotland, then to England and Ireland, the Colonies and the world. Before they died, the seeds of their work at home had been carried beyond the seas, and, if there be anything of the mission spirit in their successors, it is owing to the large view taken of the Gospel message by the fathers of the Church. The emblem of the Church of Scotland is "The bush burning but not consumed." It is not as setting it aside, but, we trust, as supplementing it, that the United Presbyterian Church has adopted "The dove with the olive leaf," and when the scattered children of the family are brought together into one Church again, the names of the Erskines, and the impulse they gave to Christian work will find their acknowledged place.

LIFE OF EBENEZER ERSKINE.

BY

JEAN L. WATSON.



EBENEZER ERSKINE.

CHAPTER I.

PARENTAGE AND YOUTH.

"Many shall rejoice at his birth; for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord."—LUKE i. 13, 14.

IN recalling the history of the Secession Church one figure rises up distinctly before us — the princely figure of Ebenezer Erskine. Though others soon joined with him in his attempts to preserve the Presbyterian Church pure and free, it was he who struck the first blow against ecclesiastical despotism, and that blow resounded throughout the utmost borders of Scotland.

When he and his associates commenced to lift up their voices in Church Courts, they never dreamt of forming a new religious denomination. They only sought to free the people from the yoke of patronage, and to rectify other abuses in the Church of Scotland, which were threatening her liberties and

dragging in the dust the crown rights of her Redeemer.

Years before, when chased upon the mountains, where the heather was stained with the life-blood of her children, that Church had preserved her independence unscathed, and kept her garments undefiled; but now, under the smile of royalty, she was selling her principles, and, like a fawning spaniel, seemed ready to lick the hand and to lie at the foot of the State.

The later Stuarts, with their boisterous irreligion, had been succeeded by a cold, dead flippancy, which had stolen the soul out of the people. There was no freshness in the past, and no promise in the future Confessions of sin and national covenants were things to be sneered at. The world had an idle, unsatisfied look; for the reign of buffoonery was at an end, but nothing had succeeded it, and the heart that sought for spiritual life could not find it.

But Erskine and his friends, moved by the Spirit of God, began to cry against the corruptions that were creeping into their Zion, to weaken her; and if they had been allowed to go on, they would have proved to her a tower of strength. This however, was not permitted them; the Moderates, having a sweeping majority of votes on their side, quashed every remonstrance, and the Assembly rebuked them with authority for daring to protest against the most tyrannical of her acts. Still they clung to the Church of

Scotland, which, sometimes by coaxing and at other threatening, made many efforts to retain them. At length, God sent the angel of His presence, to burst their fetters and bring them forth from the land of Egypt and the house of bondage, and the whole country rose up *en masse* to receive them into its bosom. Before them, where their influence extended, ignorance and apathy gave way, and the inhabitants of Scotland felt anew all the goodness and grandeur ofthe ancient message. Not only this, but an element was infused into the popular mind, which has never been lost, and now that years have elapsed, may still be detected in the national character. Long-lasting and deep-thinking theology became the thing of most moment; it was the talk and business of the people. Never, perhaps, was there a time when believers lived more by faith and less by sight, and in every incident of their lives recognised Him in whom we move and have our being. Indeed, the religion of the period on which we are to glance in our biography was, under the influence of Erskine and his friends, made full of reverence, devotion, and self-denial. Its subjects were Bible-readers and Bible-singers, richly imbued with its deep harmonies and high devotion, and hid from earthly toil and distraction under the shadow of the Almighty.

Ebenezer Erskine, the subject of our present sketch, was the son of the Rev. Henry Erskine, minister at

Cornhill, in Northumberland, about the year 1649. The Erskines were of the ancient family of Shielfield, in the Merse, descended from the House of Mar, and nearly related to the Earls of Buchan; and the mother of Ebenezer was Margaret Halcro, a native of Orkney. The founder of this family was Halcro, Prince of Denmark, and her great-grandmother was the Lady Barbara Stuart, daughter of Robert, Earl of Orkney, son of James V. Thus, by both parents, the subject of our memoir could claim to be of gentle blood; but no doubt he would rather say with the poet,

> "But higher far my proud pretensions rise—
> The child of parents passed into the skies."

The ministry of Mr Erskine in Cornhill, was of brief duration, for he was ejected from that place, as were the other Puritan Divines, by the Act of Uniformity, in the year 1662. Short, however, as his ministry there was, it was not without proofs that God had blessed his unwearied labours to the good of never-dying souls.

Mr Erskine, upon leaving Northumberland, retired to Dryburgh, near the seat of his relative, the Earl of Buchan; and, while in that place, he was repeatedly called before the Scottish Council, to answer charges of sedition and disobedience. On one occasion he was heavily fined and committed to the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, to be afterwards sent to "the Bass;"

but this sentence was commuted into one of exile from the kingdom; and he again retired into obscurity, in Northumberland, where, as before, he was called to suffer for Christ's sake.

When the Indulgence was offered, in 1687, Mr Erskine took charge of a small Presbyterian congregation near Berwick, where, under his ministry, Thomas Boston first received religious impressions. After the Revolution he was called to the parish of Chirnside, where he continued till his death, in 1696.

The death of the father seems to have been blessed to the deepening of religious impressions on the young hearts of his two sons, Ebenezer and Ralph. "The Lord helped me," says Ebenezer, on one occasion, "to speak of His goodness, and to declare the riches of His grace in some measure to my own soul. He made me tell how my father took engagements of me on his deathbed, and did cast me upon the providence of his God." Ralph also, thirty years after, said, "I took special notice of the Lord's drawing out my heart towards him at my father's death."

Mr Henry Erskine was twice married. His first wife, the mother of eight children, died of a lingering illness, in 1670. The second wife, Margaret Halcro, before mentioned, was the mother of seven, two of whom lived to be the instruments of a great work in the land—a work for which they will be remembered and honoured as long as Scotland is a country.

Ebenezer was born on the 22nd of June, 1680, and the place of his birth is now ascertained to have been Dryburgh, instead of the prison of the Bass, as was once thought. A small MS. volume of Mr Henry Erskine's has been recently brought to light, in which he has recorded the names of his children, with the dates of their birth, and of his son Ebenezer he records—

"Ebenezer was born June 22nd, being Tuesday, at one o'clock in the morning, and was baptised by Mr Gab. Semple, July 24th, being Saturday, in my dwelling-house in Dryburgh, 1680."

Dryburgh, though locally in Berwickshire, stands on the borders of Roxburghshire, on a richly-wooded peninsula formed by a bend of the Tweed. It owes its interest mainly to the beautiful view of its Abbey, profusely over-grown with foliage; and now, since the Great Minstrel has been buried within its shadow, that interest has deepened and widened, and, as has been well said, "There, amidst the dust of the powerful De Morvilles, and many a holy abbot and monk of old, and surrounded by the ashes of his own 'rough clan,' under walls scorched in many a border foray, in the heart of the valley he loved so well, and of scenes he sang, lie the mortal remains of that mighty master who has thrown a charm over the country, its history, and its traditions, that will live as long as themselves."

The house which his father occupied in the village of Dryburgh has been carefully preserved as a relic of the family, and it is still pointed out to strangers. The name Ebenezer, "a stone of assistance," was given him by his most excellent parents, as a testimony to the goodness and mercy of God, who had preserved them amidst all their trials and persecutions.

We are told little or nothing of the early years of Ebenezer's life; his education seems to have been conducted under the eye of his father at Chirnside, whither, as we have seen, the persecuted minister was called after the Revolution. A short sketch of his father's life, written by himself, hints that his youth was not devoid of gracious influences. "Sometime prior to his death, his father was heard to say, that he would desire to live no longer than to see his son Ebenezer, then in the sixteenth year of his age, succeed him in the work of the ministry." Leaving the maternal roof, Ebenezer went to Edinburgh University, where, from the records of the Town Council of that city, it appears that, in 1699, he held a bursary on the presentation of Pringle of Torwoodlee. From all we can learn, while at the University he must have been a busy student, and made good progress, both in literature and theology.

After leaving College he acted as tutor and chaplain to the Earl of Rothes, at Leslie House. In this truly Christian household he remained for some time, to the

mutual advantage of all parties; and this residence being within the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, he was taken upon trial by that court, and licensed to preach the Gospel in the year 1702.

The excellent character of Mr Erskine, as well as his remarkable abilities, soon brought him into notice, and in May 1703 he received a unanimous call to the parish of Portmoak, in Kinross-shire, to the pastoral care of which he was ordained in September following.

CHAPTER II.

LABOURS IN THE VINEYARD.

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.—PSALM cxxvi. 6.

THE rural parish of Portmoak stretches down to the margin of the beautiful Loch Leven, famous for its historical associations. It was within the ancient castle on the chief island of this loch, that the unfortunate Queen Mary was imprisoned, after her surrender at Carberry Hill (1567). Within its walls she was made to sign the deed "that snatched the crown from her ancestral line," and from thence she escaped, after a captivity of eleven months.

From another island on the lake, St. Serf, rise the ruins of the Priory of Portmoak mentioned as the first place in Scotland where the Culdees formed a settlement. The chronicler Wyntoun was a prior of this monastery, at the close of the fourteenth century, and it was here his interesting book was written.

Another fact connected with this parish may yet be noticed. In the small village of Kinnesswood, on the shore of the lake, was born Michael Bruce, the poet, whose ode on "The Cuckoo" must be familiar to most readers. A neat monument is erected to his memory in the Parish Church.

And so, in this quiet retreat, beneath the shadow of the Lomond hills, Mr Erskine devoted himself, with untiring zeal, to the duties of his sacred office; and here he laid the foundations of that excellence and learning which fitted him for the important part which he was afterwards to act in the Church.

Though Mr Erskine gave the most exemplary attention to the outward services of his profession, there is every reason to believe, that at first there was something defective in his views of divine truth. Indeed, he dates his experience of a thorough and saving change to a later time, and describes minutely the circumstance which proved the occasion of this important work. Six months after his ordination at Portmoak, he had married Alison Turpie, daughter of a writer in the town of Leslie. She was a young woman of more than ordinary talents, and of undoubted piety, and had been trained for long in the school of temptation and spiritual conflict,—so much so, that at times she had been plunged into almost uncontrollable despondency. One day he chanced to hear a confidential conversation, on the subject of

their religious experiences, between her and his brother Ralph, when the two were seated in the "bower of the garden," near the open window of his study, when he immediately thought, "They have ideas and feelings to which I am yet a stranger,—they possess a valuable *something* which I have not;" and so, struck with the simplicity of their views and the extent of their knowledge of divine things, he was led to a more close examination of the vital principles of Christianity, which issued in a degree of light and peace, to which he had before been a stranger. The conversations which followed between him and his wife gave him much of that accuracy of view by which he was so greatly distinguished, and to which may be ascribed a large part of that success which attended his ministry.

Nearly half a century after, when his diary was brought to light, traces of his wife's influence were discovered through all his career of usefulness, in a ministry most exemplary and successful. An extract from this diary may not be out of place here. In speaking of her trouble of mind and her deliverance from it, he says:—

"I remember that one day, when I was walking through my closet, after the Lord had delivered her out of the depths, He was pleased to bear in upon my spirit a sense of His goodness towards her, and towards me and my family, in her deliverance.

The consideration of the Lord's goodness in calming her spirit, made a deep impression on my soul. This, I think, was the first time that ever I felt the Lord touching my heart in a sensible manner. I dare not say much under this head; only her distress and affliction, with her deliverance, I always think, were blessed, not only to her, but to me also. I saw the fruits of it on her evidently discernible; and as to myself, I found the Lord after this now and then touching my heart, so that He drew me with the cords of love and the bands of a man. I remember particularly, some few days or weeks after the Lord had quieted the agony of her spirit, she and I were sitting together in my closet, and while we were conversing together about the things of God, the Lord was pleased to rend the vail, and give me a glimmering view of the way of salvation and redemption, which, I think, made my soul to acquiesce in Christ as the new and living way to glory. After this, she and I lived comfortably together for many years, her conversation and company being most savoury, edifying, and helpful to me."

From this time his pulpit discourses breathed an unction, and took a high tone of spirituality, which contributed to the improvement of the hearers. Christ and Him crucified now became his unwearied theme. One other extract from his diary may be here given. "Once" he says, "I was without Christ, knew not

His excellence, and saw no form or comeliness in Him why He should be desired; but now He is to me the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely. He is the very darling of my heart. I see Him to be the end of the law and the all of the Gospel, and I would be content to have the clay tabernacle dissolved, that I might be for ever with Him. O that, while I am in this world, I may be made useful to proclaim His excellency and glory to others! This is the great desire and ambition of my soul, and that which I desire to aim and level at in all my ministerial work—to commend Him to immortal souls."

Even in his external appearance and manners there was, from this time, a marked improvement. He had been often so embarrassed in public speaking, that he durst not change his attitude for fear of losing his ideas; but now he was complete master of himself, and his manner became calm and composed; as it was said, "He could look round on his audience with a dignified, yet sweet and engaging aspect, which commanded deep and universal attention. That fervent love to the Saviour, which now glowed in his heart, repressed the power of unmanly cowardice, and inspired him with a new and most impressive eloquence." His pulpit ministrations could not fail to be a source of blessing to his people, when we see how he set about the preparation for it.

"After I had ended (Saturday) the writing of my sermon, and read it once over, I went to prayer, to beg the Lord's help and assistance in all, and in the several parts of my studies, and I found my soul drawn out to the Lord, choosing Him as my alone portion and heritage. I thought my soul grounded itself anew upon the satisfaction and mediation of the glorious and ever blessed Redeemer. Here do I rest; here do I venture my soul for time and eternity."

CHAPTER III.

HIS FAITHFULNESS IN THE MINISTRY.

"Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations."—Acts xx. 18-19.

WE have seen Mr Erskine in the pulpit, and, in like manner, devout and earnest was his frame of mind when he engaged in other duties of his pastoral office. "I was made," he says, "to plead the promise, that He would by the Spirit of Truth lead me into all truth, and that He would go along with me this day, and help me to a faithful discharge of that part of my ministerial work that I was going about,—namely, visiting; that He would help me to a solid impression of God upon my spirit, and of the great worth of precious souls, and direct me to speak a word suitable to the case of the people.

He abounded in secret prayer; it was his resource in every undertaking. His sermons were begun and ended with it, and his journeys commenced with it; and so his diary is full of gracious recognitions of

God's superintending care, and kind interposing hand. Gratitude for mercies received was constantly sweetening his path, and making him exclaim, "O magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together."

The effect of this was, that multitudes came to the Church, whether on Sabbaths or on week days, when he kept service. The "Thursday Lecture," which he commenced in the early years of his ministry, attracted many hearers, not any secular business preventing masters and servants from so arranging their work before hand, that they had leisure to attend. Diets of examination, in like manner, had also their crowds of people.

In these duties of public catechising and exhorting from house to house, he generally brought forward the subject of his last Sabbath's discourse, that, by the repetition of it, he might make a more lasting impression on the manners and hearts of his people.

Erskine was in the habit, when taking his necessary recreation within the bounds of his parish, to partake with his parishioners of their homely meal, at the same time talking over their every-day affairs, thus becoming intimately acquainted with them, and able to address, or encourage, or warn, as the case might require. But though thus free and familiar, he was careful to preserve a serious and Christian demeanour. When visiting ministerially, it was his custom to enter every house with the words upon

his lips, "Peace be to this house," and after examining all the members of the family, he would conclude with fervent, particular, and affectionate prayer. Few had the gift of more effectually speaking to the comfort of the dejected Christian, or to the sinner burdened with a sense of guilt: to each and all his sole remedy was the cross of Christ.

The children of the congregation, in particular, were his charge. Remembering the Master's words to Peter, "Feed my lambs," he not only frequently addressed them from the pulpit, but every Saturday he would visit some of them in their homes, to hear them repeat the Catechism and pray with them. Then he watched over the teachers, and saw that they were fitted to guide the young in the paths of truth and soberness. Prayer meetings were established in every corner of his parish, for the management of which he drew up a set of rules; and these meetings were superintended by elders, men of divine appointment, diligent and faithful. The effect of this diligence in the discharge of his pastoral duties, we may easily believe, would be soon manifested in the growing interest of the people in spiritual things. His biographer relates, as one significant sign of attention, the practice prevalent among his people of taking notes. This class became so numerous, that Mr Erskine sometimes referred to them from the pulpit, and gave them hints for their direc-

tion. The gleanings thus carefully gathered were gone over in many a quiet home, both on Sabbath evenings and during the week, when neighbours would gather in. Specimens of these notes, which were sometimes full and accurate, may even yet be be met with, and have been handed down in families from father to son.

One great secret of his spirituality was his devout and delightful observance of the Lord's day. It was to him like an ever-fresh fountain; and if that day were filled with heavenly things, he was sure it would send down bright and refreshing streams through all the week.

And so what the Sabbath services were may well be imagined. They were frequently brought to a conclusion by singing the last verses of the seventy-second Psalm. An eye-witness used to say, "With what rapture was it sung! Never can I hear such delightful melody till I get to heaven."

A great work of revival was the consequence of the pastor's faithfulness. From all the country round, even from sixty miles distant, people flocked to Portmoak. Doubtless, Mr Erskine owed much to his fine manner and appearance, and his dignified, yet easy bearing; but the great charm lay in the earnestness and thorough evangelical matter of his discourses.

"Contemporary writers," says the Rev. Dr Andrew

Thomson, "describe him (Erskine) as a man who combined, in singular union, great suavity of manner with intrepidity of action, simplicity of aim with that profound knowledge of man which lies at the root of practical wisdom. His bitterest enemies have never been able to establish a charge against his sincerity or scrupulous conscientiousness. Possessed of a large degree of natural eloquence, this had all the advantage of a voice of great depth and compass, of a grave and simple delivery such as most beseems an ambassador of God, and of an outward appearance of such unusual nobility and majesty as was the theme of general remark, and commanded among his hearers universal awe." "I never saw so much of the majesty of God," said Mr Hutton of Dalkeith, "in any mortal man, as in Ebenezer Erskine." Mr Adam Gib, of Edinburgh, having asked a friend if he had ever heard Mr Erskine preach, was answered in the negative. "Well, then, Sir," rejoined Mr Gib, with emotion, "you never heard the gospel in its majesty." A more striking testimony still, perhaps, was given in the reproof which one hearer, who had travelled more than twenty miles to hear Mr Erskine preach, gave to another who complained of drowsiness, "O man! there is a savour coming out of that pulpit, which I think might keep any person awake." His was a rich and spontaneous mind, and from its affluent soil the crop came bountifully. His genial piety

was full of fragrant warmth and ripening wisdom; but there was little singularity. No dazzling passages startled or amused the hearers; the love of God shed abroad in his heart shone in his face, and was itself a sermon; and so, his piety being of that type which it is not easy to record, the crowds who came to hear him were moved into feeling, and confessed that "surely God is in this place."

Above all seasons were the sacramental ones in Portmoak. Feeling that they were fighting together to uphold a good cause in the land, godly ministers in the Church were drawn together by no common tie; and, when they met, their intercourse with one another was often strengthening and refreshing. One of the most delightful occasions of these reunions was, when the Lord's Supper was being celebrated in some of their churches, and above the most of the others were those times at Portmoak, when a goodly company of gifted ministers, anticipating the event for weeks before, would come together, and aid in conducting the hallowed solemnities. By this time the gospel, in many parts of the country, had become a dead and lifeless thing, and the godly prized such meetings more than we, in our privileged days, can easily realise. At many of these communions might be seen a young man, "who had risen before the morning sun and travelled often a distance of more than fifteen miles over the intervening moun-

tains. He was wrapped in a shepherd's plaid, and lisened, with intellectual countenance and delighted heart, to the gracious words which fell from the speaker's lips. He was then an obscure teacher in a rustic day-school. Thirty years afterwards, he was known throughout the land, as the author of the Bible Dictionary and the Self-Interpreting Bible."

So great was the gathering of people in that quiet secluded parish, that it was found necessary to form two separate assemblies in the open air, on the sides of the neighbouring hill, independent of those in the church, and these assemblies were addressed by successive preachers, to whom they listened attentively for hours.

As to how the minister was exercised before he went forth to deliver his message, we again must have recourse to his diary. On July 7th, 1714, he writes:—

"I was under great fears as to my through bearing in the work of this day before I went to public worship, which, I remember, put me to my knees, and made me pray, that if the Lord did not go with me, He would rather, lay His hand on me and stop my going further to discredit the gospel. The Lord was pleased graciously to hear and pity; for I never remember that I had more freedom in my life than this day, in delivering my Master's message. There was a great company of people, so that I was obliged to preach in the open field.

"The Lord gave me a composure of mind and suggested many things to me in speaking, which I had not so much as thought on before. The people heard with a great deal of greediness and attention, so as if they would have drawn the word out of me. And I cannot but think some souls have this day been converted, or confirmed and comforted. I preached on Isaiah xiii. 1, the second doctrine drawn from the connection being that the gracious discovery of Christ darkens all the pretended excellency of idols. I went to see some sick folk; and one David Wilkie, a very judicious person, told me that his daughter, Margaret, was made to go home with a strange work upon her Spirit, as if a flame of love and desire after Christ had been kindled in her breast. I take the Lord's countenance in this day's work as a seal of my ministry, and a pledge of His being with me on the great feast day." This was within a few days of the sacramental Sabbath. Many, on their death-beds, remembered these Sabbaths on the hills of Portmoak, as Bethels where they had enjoyed renewed manifestations of God's love. "They say," writes Mr Erskine's sister, speaking of one of these Portmoak communions, "that to the comfortable, felt experience of many, it was as great a day of the gospel as ever they witnessed."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEACHER TAUGHT.

"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: but nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness."—Heb. xii. 11.

MR ERSKINE was too faithful a branch of the true vine to escape the husbandman's pruning-knife. "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit;" and so Mr Erskine, from time to time, was visited with successive and severe personal and domestic trials. The year 1713 was one of sorrow upon sorrow. Within the short space of a few months, three of his children, Ralph, Henry, and Alexander, aged respectively two, nine, and five years, were taken from him by death; and the same year he lost his sister at Dunfermline. In his diary, with a breaking heart, he records his losses; and yet it is not the sorrow of the world, but of one who could see his Father's love in every blow.

"*April* 27*th*, 1713.—My dear, sweet, and pleasant

child, Ralph, died on Tuesday, last week, about a quarter after seven in the morning. His death was very grievous and affecting to my wife and me; but good is the will of the Lord. He takes and gives, blessed be the name of the Lord. . . . . About half an hour before the child's breath went out, he felt perfectly calm, and was relieved from the sore tossings he had; and being laid on his back in the cradle, his eye appeared quick and lively, and his countenance seemed to invite all that beheld him to follow him to glory, and to prepare for that inheritance to which he was going."

"*July* 1*st*, 1713.—Since the last time I have here marked, I have been sadly, *sadly* afflicted with the loss of other two pleasant children. My dear Henry Erskine, my first-born, having died, by the will of God, June 8th, being Monday, about 2 o'c. in the afternoon—about 8 years of age. He took his disease with the measles, about half a year ago, in Dunfermline, which did cast him into a decay ; and having brought him home, the smallpox came into the family, which carried him off about two or three days after the height. He was a blooming, pleasant child; and, according to his age, had an excellent capacity, was profiting exceedingly in his learning, and knew many of the fundamentals of religion above many of his age. While he lay on his sick-bed, I frequently conversed with him about the affairs of his soul;

and he gave me great satisfaction by expressing a desire for Christ, and a desire to be with Him rather than to be with father and mother, and friends and relations, here in this world. And that same day that he died, he frequently desired me to pray with him, and would frequently cry out, when he saw me, 'Oh! father, father, pray for me!" and I thought it observable that, although all the day he died he was almost continually raving, yet about half-an-hour before his death, having desired me to pray, he lay perfectly calm and silent during the whole time of prayer. All these things I take as grounds of hope that my sweet Henry is now praising and triumphing with Christ in glory."

A third time death enters the pastor's dwelling, and on this occasion it is his son Alexander, a pleasant boy of five, who is taken home to his Father's house above; and then the poor, afflicted servant of God takes up his pen to notice yet another death, that of a well-beloved sister. Of this he writes—

"My brother Ralph and I were sent for, by express, on Wednesday, to see my dear sister. . . . She frequently expressed her love to Christ and her high esteem of Him and desire after him; and, just about the time of her death, I was exhorting her to roll her soul over upon the merits of the exalted Redeemer, and asked if she were content to venture her eternal all upon Him, and she answered, 'Yes, yes,' which

was all she was able to say; and I observed her cast her eyes and hands up towards heaven. I have now ground to hope that she is with the Lord. My brother Ralph told me that he was helped to great importunity with God on her behalf, and I cannot but say the same. I was helped, I recollect, to plead the blessed ransom and propitiation on her behalf. God is willing, on His part, to save lost sinners, and has found a ransom for this very end. I could not, therefore but believe that He would be gracious to her, seeing I was confident that she was willing, and declared her entire satisfaction with the method of salvation through a Redeemer. On this ground I build my hope, that she is this day singing hallelujahs with the ransomed on Mount Zion. . . . . I got my soul, I thought, sometimes sweetly enlarged for my poor sister in distress. I found particularly a great melting of soul at a time when my brother and I went alone and prayed together on her behalf. Both he and I were very much touched with tenderness, accompanied with a pleading and wrestling spirit. Her death was very weighty and affecting to me; yet it pleased the Lord to turn the edge of my thoughts and affections towards an endless eternity which was fast approaching to myself."

Mr Erskine at this time, being in delicate health, had an impression that his days on earth would be few; but God had a great work for His servant to do

in this world before he left it, and He was only, by these afflictions, preparing him for it.

"*January* 10*th*, 1714," we have him writing, "This morning my soul was exceedingly refreshed with the thought of my approaching dissolution, when I shall be guarded by angels into the place of blessedness, and ascend into God's holy hill, where I shall meet with my father and my little children that are gone before me, and all the ransomed on Mount Zion; especially where I shall see Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and God the Judge of all."

Then, we have another entry of his diary this year, for his son Ebenezer has been laid down with fever, and the father's heart is filled with anxiety, in case he too is wanted in heaven. But his mouth is filled with praise, for, beyond expectation, his child is restored, though he himself is next prostrated by the same disease. Amidst all his ravings and tossings, his mind at that time was fixed on God. He says:—"I thought I beheld Him working wonders before me, as in the land of Egypt, rending rocks, levelling mountains, making crooked things straight, filling up valleys, and doing great things for me, yea, wonders without number. Yet I was not in the least terrified at the sight, because I thought I saw Him to be my God, my Father, reconciled to me in Christ, and doing all these things with a design to form suitable conceptions and impressions in my soul."

He recovered, but another of his family fell sick, and again the father's faith and patience was sorely tried; but he knew the hand that smote him, and bowed before it, and his little daughter was given back to her mother and himself, which filled their mouths with praise and thanksgiving.

Of the benefit of these afflictions to the personal improvement of the minister, his biographer says :— "His parishioners tenderly sympathised with him under his repeated and heavy distresses; and, at the same time, they observed with pleasure that these trials were succeeded by an increased fervency in enforcing personal religion, and in making a close application of the truth to the conscience and the heart, which infused fresh energy into all his efforts on behalf of immortal souls."

Seldom has a scene of purer domestic happiness been witnessed, than that created by the love of God and of one another in the quiet manse at Portmoak. The pastor sat in his study, wisely improving his time in the acquisition of divine knowledge, or diligently engaged in writing his sermons; his beloved partner, true helpmeet as she was, zealously looked to the ways of her household, or attended to guests who had been invited to partake of their well-known hospitality, or were attracted to the manse by the learning and religious experience of the minister; while the children, obedient and helpful, growing up

like olive plants, gave an air of cheerful liveliness to their much-loved home. But death again entered the house, in the midst of all this happiness, and the wife and mother was called away to receive the reward of her labours and hear the "Well done" of her Lord. Of this sad event the bereaved husband writes to his sister, "It is a matter of praise that, though for a long while she was held in bondage through fear of death, yet about twenty days before her decease the Lord loosed her bonds and spoke peace to her by this word, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.' The Lord took her through Jordan, without letting her know when she was in the midst of it, till she was on the other side of Immanuel's land; for the fever carried her off both insensibly as to herself and easily, without the least pang or distortion of her countenance."

When Bunyan's Pilgrims came to the river, they found that their much-dreaded enemy was "as still as a stone;" and so experienced the good wife and mother when she too was called to pass over the Jordan of death, for "there was no other way to the gate" of the celestial city.

The brothers, especially his brother Ralph, and their surviving sister, Mrs Balderston, gathered around the bereaved husband, and very tender and consoling was their sympathy; for we know of nothing more beautiful in the history of these times, than the fraternal

attachmnt of that family. They seemed to feel that each other's griefs were their own; still it was the compassionate High Priest on whom the sorrowing heart depended, and from whom he received comfort, and so he writes, "O to be helped to honour and serve Him while in this weary wilderness, and to be found so doing. I was made to wonder at my own folly in sinning against the Lord, and to wonder at the Lord's pardoning mercy."

A few months afterwards, on the occasion of his dear sister losing her husband, he writes—

"Dear afflicted sister,—I know, or at least I may know the heart of a stranger in losses of this kind with which you are now visited. My wound is yet fresh and green, and therefore my sympathy with and concern for you cannot fail to be the more lively. But glory to our exalted Lord, that neither you nor I have any reason to mourn as they that have no hope. Your worthy friend and mine had his conversation adorned with the genuine characters of a true citizen of Zion (Psalm xv.), and therefore you have reason to believe and hope that he has now his abode in God's tabernacle and holy hill, even in Mount Zion, the city of the living God, where he is joined to the general assembly of angels and spirits of just men made perfect, who are beholding the King in His beauty, and singing the new song (Rev. v.), 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and

riches, wisdom and strength, and honour and glory and blessing.' Oh! how sweet a balance may it be to our spirits under the loss of such dear relations, to think of the heartsome work in which they are now employed, the heartsome company to which they are joined, and the lightsome house of many mansions wherein they dwell, not as passengers, but as pillars that shall go no more out. Should we not rather long to be with them, than to grudge their removal from us, and from the crazy tabernacles of clay where in they groaned under so many burdens! Let us then lift up our heads in the hope of that life they desired, and are now actually possessed of. The time is short! and therefore let us be encouraged, for that within a little we shall follow them, and then they and we shall be for ever with the Lord; which, indeed, is best of all. What an excellent thing it is, to be fairly landed on the other side of Jordan, standing on the banks of Immanuel's land, crying 'Victory, victory, victory, for evermore, through the blood of the Lamb, over sin, the devil, death, and hell!' How sweet it is to be sitting with overcomers on the same throne with the Son of God, as He also overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne! Let us *up with our drooping hearts;* for the same chariot that has carried our worthy friends to glory, where they walk with Christ in white, will speedily return to fetch us also; and, though they

and we drop the mantle of the body in the passage; yet we shall receive it again with advantage on the morning of the resurrection, when these vile bodies shall be made like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus. Christ's dead men shall live; as His dead body shall they arise, when the dew of God's Spirit shall, like the dew of herbs, descend upon them: and when that melodious sound shall break through the clouds as a trumpet, "Awake, ye that dwell in dust, and sing." Then they and we shall say one to another "Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready."

But not yet was his cup of suffering full, another of the lambs was taken to the fold, his "dear, sweet, and pleasant child, Isabel." In this sad event, we have again a glimpse of the suffering father's heart: "I remember," he says, "that, a day or two before the child fell sick, she was in my closet. She and I being alone, I took her on my knee and dandled her, and she was very fond of me, and took me round the neck and kissed me, which engaged my heart very much. But my love and affection to the child filled me with a strong desire to have Christ formed in her soul, and therefore I began to commend Christ to her, and the Lord helped me to do so in such words as were suitable to her capacity, to which she seemed very attentive. Particularly, I told her

that she would die, and that it would be better to die and go to heaven, where Christ is, and where she would meet with her dear mother, than to be here; at which words the dear child gave a *broad look* up into my face, as if she had been taken with the things. I bless the Lord who put it into my heart and mouth to converse with her at that time. I hope the Lord entered into her heart with what I said to her. She died pleasantly (of smallpox) without any pang or throe; her soul, I hope, being carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; and her body is buried at her mother's side, in the chapel burying-ground, Scotland Well, in her brother Alexander's grave.

"I take it kindly that the Lord comes to my family to gather lilies wherewith to garnish the upper Sanctuary, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And oh! it sometimes affords me a pleasing prospect to think I have so much *plenishin'* in heaven before me and that when I enter the gates of glory, I shall not only be welcomed by the whole general assembly of saints and angels, but that my wife and four pleasant babes will in a particular manner welcome me to those regions of glory, and I shall join in the hallelujahs of the higher home which shall never have an end."

Six children were still spared to him. Of them he writes,—"It is the very desire of my soul, that they may be a seed to serve the Lord, and to make His name to be remembered through all generations."

Three years and a half after the death of his first wife, Mr Erskine married again. The lady was Miss Grace Webster, daughter of an eminently godly minister in Edinburgh. She seems to have been a worthy helpmeet to Mr Erskine, and a faithful mother to his little ones. The January following, his widowed mother died in his house. She had spent the thirty years of her widowhood between the manses of her two sons, Ebenezer and Ralph, and, according to their testimony, she died happily, resting in the Lord.

CHAPTER V.

CHURCH MATTERS.

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong."—1 Cor. xvi. 13.

IT may not be thought out of place if we, before proceeding further with the life of Ebenezer Erskine, were to give a short account of the difficulties in Church matters with which he and his friends had to contend.

The union of the two kingdoms in 1707, though productive of much good to Scotland, was not without injurious influence upon her ecclesiastical liberties. The Parliament being abolished in that country, English statesmen regarded her Constitution with suspicion and dislike, and a few years later (1712) they passed two Acts tending to "distract the councils and violate the liberties of the Church"—the one imposed upon ministers the Abjuration Oath, a bill for the toleration of Episcopal worship in Scotland; the other wrested from the people the right of electing their own ministers.

The *Oath of Abjuration* was regarded by the godly in the Church as a snare to take from them their liberties, it was "so constructed as to involve the swearer in the approbation of an English Act of Parliament, which provided that the successor to the crown should always be of the Episcopal communion. In this way politics got mixed with the controversy. A Tory ministry being then in power, they bore no good will to the Presbyterian interest. The subject of toleration for Scottish Episcopacy became one of the questions of the day. With a view to nullify the toleration, a party in the Presbyterian church procured insertion of an oath abjuring the Pretender, which the court party succeeded in extending to all clergymen. The objections of the Presbyterians to this was that it turned upon the conditions of the Act of Succession.

But the restoration of the Law of Patronage struck a yet heavier blow at the liberty and purity of the Church. The passing of this Act was at complete variance with the Revolution Settlement and the Treaty of Union, which secured the Church against the burden of lay patronage. When proposed, it was pushed through both Houses of Parliament before the Church could offer almost any opposition. The news of this outrage, when it reached Scotland, roused the country to indignation, and the General Assembly sent a deputation of ministers to remonstrate against

this shameful deed; but they were not permitted to speak, and so the right of the Christian people to elect their own pastors was wrested from them in an unlawful manner. Had men of the stamp of Knox, the Melvilles, and Henderson, been in the Church at that time, they would doubtless have stood upon their rights and refused to submit to such tyranny; but, unfortunately, Principal Carstares was at the helm of affairs, and, though few men had a more blameless career and died more lamented, he was not made of the strong, resolute stuff of the old Reformers, for he yielded to what he thought was a stern necessity and sacrificed the liberties of the people.

At first the evils of patronage were not felt, because ministers would not accept of livings unaccompanied by the call of the people. But this delicacy was short-lived. Within less than twenty years after the passing of the Act, the intrusion of unsuitable ministers into parishes, contrary to the wish of the people, was very common. The Moderate party had their ranks increased and strengthened by such means, but the godly in the land saw with sorrow that the Church had "left her first love," and that, under the blight of heresy, the bloom of her youth was fast departing.

The first who disturbed the doctrinal harmony of the Church was Mr John Simson, Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow (1714). Mr Simson was an ingenious sophist, arrogant and conceited, and was

able to puzzle his brethren by twisting and turning his statements. He betrayed his secret leanings to Arian sentiments. His opponent was Dr James Webster, a minister of Edinburgh, an old sufferer under the Covenant. For several years the zealous, devoted old man accused his wary antagonist, and at last the Assembly of 1717 passed a lenient sentence on Simson, warning him to be careful how he gave forth such opinions.

In that same Assembly, "two members" says Dr M'Crie, "might have been seen engaged in earnest conversation." One of these was Mr Drummond of Crieff, and the other, "a man of middle stature and mild countenance, little more than forty years of age, but 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.' This was Thomas Boston, author of the 'Fourfold State,' the 'Crook in the Lot,' and other productions long familiar as the Bible to the Scottish Peasantry."

Boston was the son of an old Covenanter, "a miller and maltster withal," in the good old town of Dunse, and long remembered sleeping on his father's bosom, when that worthy was incarcerated, for his principles, in the Canongate Tolbooth. After struggling with many difficulties, he was settled first at Simprin, then a separate parish from Swinton, and next in the moorish district of Ettrick. The deficiencies of early education were compensated by a youth of study, and by natural gifts, admirably qualifying him for im-

pressing, as a preacher and writer, the minds of his countrymen; though, from constitutional timidity, he did not shine as a speaker in public debate. Imagining that we are listening to his conversation with Mr Drummond, we may hear him telling his friend, "When I was a student, I heard Mr Mair often speak of being divorced from the law, dead to it, and the like; but I understood very little of the matter. However, my thoughts being after my settlement at Simprin turned that way, as I was sitting one day in a house there, I espied above the window-head two old books, which, when I had taken down, I found entitled, the one "*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*" and the other "*Christ's Blood Flowing Freely to Sinners.*" These, I reckon, had been brought home from England by the master of the house, a soldier in the time of the civil wars. The first I relished greatly. I found it came close to the point I was in quest of, and to show the consistency of those things which I could not reconcile before; so that I rejoiced in it as a light which the Lord had seasonably struck in my darkness. By the end of 1700 I had digested the doctrine of the book, and had begun to preach it."

And so this old little book, brought home by the soldier of the commonwealth, and which Boston saw "above the window-head of his cottage at Simprin, was destined to do a great work in the Church and

the world!" From what small beginnings do mighty events flow. Let us trace further the history of this book. It was borrowed by Mr Drummond, and fell into the hands of James Hog of Carnock, who republished it in 1717, with a recommendatory preface. It had been like dew to the soul of the pious tender-conscienced old man, and he longed to give others a share of the blessing; but, "orthodoxy in high places was alarmed," and Principal Hadow, of St Andrews, began to preach against it, denouncing it as fraught with Antinomian tendencies.

For four years after this a host of pamphlets on both sides of the question appeared, amongst which may be mentioned "The Political Disputant," "The Snake in the Grass," etc. "The Marrow of Modern Divinity," already referred to, and which caused this sensation, was published in 1648, by Mr Edward Fisher, the son of an English Knight and Master of Arts in the University of Oxford. It was a compilation from the writings of Reformers—Luther and Calvin; also some English Divines, such as Ainsworth, Ames, Bolton, Hall, and Hooker. It had passed the scrutiny of the Westminster Assembly, and bore the approval of its leading divines. It consists of a dialogue between *Evangelista,* a minister of the Gospel; *Nomista,* a legalist; *Antinomista,* an Antinomian; and *Neophytus,* a young Christian. Though written in an interesting and popular style,

there are scattered through it expressions requiring to be explained. Boston's edition gave explanations largely; but, still there were in it unguarded though well-meant statements which it was difficult to vindicate, and its enemies misrepresented and twisted them to their own use. The various steps of the process taken against the "Marrow Men" are too long to be taken up in our limited space. It need only be said that the General Assembly gave instructions to their Commission to "inquire into the publishing and spreading of books and pamphlets." The Commission accordingly took up the work and appointed a committee for that purpose, under the name of "The Committee for Purity of Doctrine." The Assembly which met the year following (1720) condemned the "Marrow," and prohibited ministers from "either preaching, writing, or printing anything in favour of it."

This decision, entered upon hastily, without carefully examining the book, met with disapproval in many parts of the country, both amongst the clergy and laity; and at next Assembly a paper was drawn up by Ebenezer Erskine, minister of Portmoak, and signed by twelve of the brethren, remonstrating against the judgment, as being injurious to evangelical truth.

This Assembly being suddenly dissolved, in consequence of the illness of the King's Commissioner,

the Earl of Rothes, the case was again remitted to the Commission (1722). The Committee for Purity of Doctrine "turned the Commission against" Erskine and his friends, by preparing "twelve queries" directed against the "twelve Representers."

We need not enumerate the queries and answers of the "Representers;" it may only be stated that these held the doctrines of all evangelical Christians throughout the world. But the Moderate party were now the largest in the Church Courts, and consequently the next Assembly condemned the Representation, and ordered the Representers to be rebuked and admonished at the bar.

The admonition having been received with all gravity, Mr Kid of Queensferry stepped forward, and gave in a protest, subscribed by all the Representers. In this document, they solemnly protested against the Act of the General Assembly condemning the "Marrow," and declaring, that "it shall be lawful for us to preach and bear testimony unto the truths condemned by the said Acts of the Assembly." For thus deciding to act in opposition to the supreme court of the Church, the parties would have been summarily deposed, and the secession, in that case, would have taken place ten years earlier than it happened; but government, dreading the effects of such a catastrophe when the country was threatened with invasion, exerted its influence, and so the protest was unheeded

—it was not so much as read. And thus, by a sort of compromise, the case was hastily disposed of, both parties remaining of the same mind as before. The Assembly appearing to think her authority had been duly maintained by the infliction of the censure, and also being cautioned by the King's letter against unhappy divisions, took up the royal hint, and let matters alone.

CHAPTER VI.

CHURCH CONTROVERSIES—Continued.

"It were needful for me to write unto you and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints."—Jude, ver. 3.

WE must now turn back a few years, and see how Ebenezer Erskine conducted himself while the controversy we have referred to was raging in the Church. We saw that he drew up the document of dissent against the judgment of the Assembly of 1720, but before that he had taken an active part in ecclesiastical matters. "It is a matter of traditionary remembrance in Portmoak," says his biographer, "that, when the Union of England and Scotland was in progress, Mr Erskine openly avowed himself in favour of it, to the great umbrage of many of his parishioners, among whom, as throughout Scotland, it was regarded as an unpatriotic and injurious measure."

Mr Erskine's views were decided against the inconsistency of the Abjuration Bill with the principles of the Church of Scotland; but he conducted himself

wisely and moderately when opposed by those who differed from him. Having come into collision with another minister, Mr Anderson of Falkland, about the taking of the oath, Mr Anderson having done so, Mr Erskine hastened to make amends for his commencement of the disagreement, by asking his opponent to preach in his church on the next Fast-day, and adding, "It is making me uneasy to think there should be any misunderstanding betwixt me and a person whom I so much love and value; and therefore, dear brother, let all unhappy differences be buried for ever in silence, and let us in time coming construe favourably one another's words and actions, as becomes brethren—which I hope we are in more respects than one. For my own part, whatever harsh thoughts you may have of me, I can freely declare, with the utmost sincerity, that, (though indeed of small value, yet such as they are) you have had my cordial sympathy in your late affliction, and prayers for the Lord's countenance upon your labours, and particularly on the great work you have in hand."

Though Mr Erskine's voice was not heard lifted up against the Patronage Act in Parliament, his views were too well known to be misapprehended; and when, years after, he was called to the high places of the field to fight against its tendencies, he proved himself a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The first time he appears in opposition to this pernicious Act was

when, as a member of the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, he was chosen to preside at the moderating of "a call" to settle a minister in a parish against the wish of the people. After various contentions, the presentee's ordination was effected, but Mr Erskine dissented, and declined to take part in the settlement.

One day, during these debates, the patron, Sir John Malcolm of Ballingry, invited the Presbytery to dinner; but when giving his invitation, said to Mr Erskine, resenting his opposition, "Mr Erskine, you are none of us to-day." To this he answered, with spirit, "Sir John, you do me great honour. It gives me the truest pleasure that we are agreed in this; for I scorn to be one of them who dare to oppress the Christian people, and to rob them of their just privileges."

In a letter to a sister, about this time, he says: "All the power and policy of hell is set to work for the ruin and overthrow of the Church of Scotland. The prospect of the sifting storm, that seems to be at hand, is like sometimes to stagger and shake me, and makes my spirit to shrink within me. I know not how I shall be able to stand the storm itself, or how I shall do in the swellings of Jordan. Being as yet entirely unacquainted as to my own experience with suffering for the truth and cause of Christ, I am afraid to say, with Peter, 'Though all men should forsake Thee, yet will not I.' But this I may say, if He needs my property, my family, my very heart's blood, to bear

witness to His cause and work, I am obliged, though they were ten thousand times more valuable than they are, to lay them all down at His feet, and follow Him to a Golgotha or a Calvary." And in 1714, after a sacrament at Orwell, he writes in his diary—"I recognised in secret the solemn dedication I had made of myself in public, and avowed the Lord to be my God. I was made to say that through His grace I would die for Him; and would die on a gibbet for Him, if He would carry me through. O, my soul! thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God."

The Lord was preparing His servant for the great work He wanted him to perform, and the better to prepare him for it, He was calling him to pass through many a sorely contested struggle, and to see where his strength lay, which would enable him, when the worst came, to look away from man and seek help and direction from Himself alone. When, by an Act of Assembly, 1720, the "Marrow" was condemned, his brethren assigned to him the task of vindicating the truth and drawing up the first draft of the "Representation," not to defend the book, so often referred to, but, as advocates of important principles and doctrines, and which they thought the Assembly had, through "oversight," condemned through the "Marrow." Mr Erskine, in referring afterwards to his share of the work said, "I look upon it as a piece of the greatest honour that was ever put upon

me, that the Lord called me forth to lift up a banner and to suffer reproach for His precious truths, which, I am convinced, suffered so much injury by the Act Condemnatory, 1720, and Act Explicatory, 1722."

Though the Assembly's decision in 1722 finished the controversies in the supreme court, Erskine and his brethren suffered no small annoyance for their principles in the presbyteries and synods. As a proof of this, when the parish of Kirkcaldy, in 1725, called Mr Erskine, the Church Courts decided against his removal, dreading his influence in a situation of greater importance than was his small parish. This was the third time he had been prevented accepting such calls for a similar reason.

Alluding to this pitiful piece of spite in regard to Kirkcaldy, which happened to fall in with entire concurrence of his own views, he gently said:—"I very heartily acquiesce in the sentence of the reverend Commission continuing me minister of Portmoak. I adore Him who hath the stars in His right hand, who ever fixed me in this corner of His vineyard, where, I hope, I shall have my crown and rejoicing in that day. . . . . And I have no manner of resentment against the judicatories of the Church on that head, for whom I desire to have all due deference in the Lord."

The parish of Kinross gave him a unanimous call in 1728, but Mr Erskine declined to leave his charge.

However, a few years later, in May 1731, on again receiving another cordial and unanimous call to Stirling, and the Presbytery deciding in favour of the translation, he immediately acquiesced. For twenty-eight years he had been at Portmoak, and though the people mourned sorely on his leaving, they felt that, having had the best of his days, they had no cause to murmur; and several members of his flock removed with him to Stirling, that they might continue to enjoy his ministrations.

Mr Erskine was translated to Stirling in September 1731. This old town is one of the most interesting in Scottish history. It is situated on the southern bank of the Forth, on the sloping ridge of a hill crowned by the Castle; it was long considered the key of the Highlands—hence, the saying, "The Forth bridles the wild Highlander," because Stirling commanded the passage of the river. The Castle was a favourite residence of the Stuart monarchs, and in consequence takes a prominent place in the history of Scotland. It was of old called Snowdown, giving rise to the name of the "Knight of Snowdown, James Fitz-James," in Sir Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake." The view from the Castle-hill is magnificent, to the north and east are the Ochil Hills, and the windings of the Forth through the Carse of Stirling, referred to in the song, "Are these the Links of Forth, she said?" To the west lies the vale of Monteith bounded

by the Highland mountains. The Campsie Hills close the horizon to the south, and in the foreground, to the east, are the town, the Abbey Craig, and the ruins of Cambuskenneth Abbey; and from it, in a clear day, the Castle of Edinburgh and Arthur's Seat are seen.

The Greyfriars, or Franciscan Church of Stirling, was erected in 1494, by James IV. It is a handsome Gothic building, now divided into two places of worship In this church the Earl of Arran, Regent of the Kingdom, abjured Romanism, 1543. It was also the scene of the coronation of James VI., in 1567, then only thirteen months old, when the sermon was preached by John Knox. The church had not until this time been used as a Protestant place of worship, but, owing to the charge to which he was inducted having been lately erected, the ministers fell back on this old Popish building in which to hold their services.

At Stirling, as in Portmoak, Mr Erskine's labours were abundant. He was unwearied in the discharge of his duties, and his hands were upheld by like faithful brethren in the town.

These ministers, in order to prevent the profanation of the table of the Lord, resolved to examine privately all that should seek admittance to this ordinance; and this involved no small amount of labour, for the examination embraced the whole body of communicants. In all other duties Mr Erskine was equally

assiduous, as is seen from his different note-books and sermons, as well as several volumes of discourses.

At the time of Mr Erskine's translation to Stirling, matters in the Church were hastening to a crisis, while the state of religion in Scotland was gradually declining. The influence of the Union with England was telling on the social tastes of the people. Wodrow, the historian, now an old man, describes the change in the Church. Speaking of the Assembly of 1726, he says—"There was the greatest number of young faces ever I saw in an Assembly. Their very garb and habit were not what had been in former meetings. And indeed the very decency and gravity proper for such as have their eye to divinity is not to be seen about them. And, I am told, several of them go openly to the dancing school at Edinburgh, and very nice and exact as to that. The Church of Scotland," he adds, "was never so low in point of principals and professors of divinity in colleges as at this day; and what influence this must have on learning and entrants to the ministry, I fear after ages will find." "This ominous prediction was speedily verified," says Dr M'Crie, "Whatever might be said of the progress of general literature, there can be no question that theological learning was sadly at a discount. Instead of the ponderous tomes of the preceding century, and the dingy productions of the covenant, youthful aspirants preferred the gay pages

of Addison, the Tatler, Pope, Swift, and Shaftesbury. Our Scottish poet Allan Ramsay had just opened his circulating library in the High Street of the metropolis, from which emporium loose plays and trashy novels and romances, of the worst London type, were scattered broadcast over the land; vitiating alike the morals and the tastes of the rising generation."

Ramsay's own poems and his "Gentle Shepherd" had certainly no such injurous effect.

In the Assembly of 1731, the overture was brought forward "concerning the method of planting vacant churches." This was "a kind of supplement to the law of Patronage," being intended to apply to those cases in which the patrons, through some cause or other, declined to exercise the right of presentation; and it was enacted "that the minister should be chosen by the majority of the elders and heritors, if Protestants." This Act ignored the voice of the Christian people, and therefore gave great dissatisfaction throughout the country. "Heritors being Protestants," included Prelatists and Jacobites. The measure was sent down to the presbyteries; but though the majority of these disapproved of it, the Assembly, breaking through the Barrier Act, passsed it, and would not listen to the voice of the people, though protests and petitions, signed by hundreds, were sent into that court. Mr Erskine, being that year a member of Assembly, demanded that his

dissent, with the others, should be received and recorded. His speech on that occasion has been discovered, and may here be given as a proof of his bravery and consistency. He says—

"Moderator, I find, by the reading of the minutes, that the dissent which was entered yesterday by some members of the Assembly is not marked, and I crave that it may be marked, it being a privilege common in every free country. Moderator, the reason why I insist that it may be marked is, that I consider this Act of the Assembly to be without warrant from the Word of God, and inconsistent with the acts and constitution of this Church since our Reformation, particularly in our Books of Discipline. As I said before in the Assembly, viz., in the case of Kinross, so, Moderator, I now say it again: I know of no ecclesiastical authority under heaven but what is derived from Christ, the exalted King of Zion. It is in His name and authority that we are met and constituted in a national Assembly. He is the alone foundation that God hath laid in Zion. His righteousness is the foundation of our justification and acceptance before God, and His authority as a King is the alone foundation of all government and discipline—laws and acts—that are to be imposed upon His Church. And in regard I do not see upon what part of the Word this Act is founded, I therefore conclude that it wants the authority of Christ, and that the Assembly, in

this particular, has gone off from the true foundation of government.

"We are charged with the custody and feeding of His lambs, His sheep, His little ones. It is not the world's great ones, or rich ones, that we are entrusted with. No, Moderator; and yet by this Act, the privilege of His little ones is conferred upon heritors, and the great ones of the world. I am so far from thinking this Act conferring the power upon heritors, beyond other men, to come and choose ministers of the Gospel to be founded on the Word, that I consider it diametrically contrary to it. What difference does a piece of land make between man and man in the affairs of Christ's kingdom, which is not of this world? Are we not commanded in the word to do nothing by partiality? Whereas here is the most manifest partiality in the world. We must have 'the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,' or the privileges of His Church, without respect of persons; whereas by this Act we show respect to this man with the gold ring and gay clothing beyond the man with the vile raiment and poor attire. I conceive, Moderator, that our public management and acts should run in the channel with God's way, not diverging. We are told that 'God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith.' It is not said He hath chosen the heritors of this world as we have done, but He hath 'chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.' And if they be

heirs of the kingdom, I wish to know by what warrant they are stript of the privileges of the kingdom.

"Moderator, I consider that by this Act the Assembly have sunk one of the principal branches of our Reformation inserted in our Books of Discipline; I mean the right of the Church and members thereof to choose their own pastors—a privilege with the custody of which we are entrusted. Our worthy forefathers handed down this among other branches of the Reformation, at the expense of their blood and treasure. And, that I may not be accessory to the betraying of a trust which we are obliged to hand down in safety to our posterity and the generation following, I insist that my dissent may be marked in the records of this Assembly."

This speech was of no avail, and the only course now open to Mr Erskine and his friends was, to testify from the pulpit against the backsliding of the times, and the growing corruptions of the Church with the arbitrary conduct of the prevailing party in the Assembly. Having been chosen Moderator of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, it became his duty to preach at the opening of that court in October, 1732. Taking for his text Psalm cxviii. 22, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner," he boldly denounced the leading rulers of the Church under the name of builders, asserted the supreme rights of the Lord Jesus as the

Head of the Church; and, feeling that he stood as an "ambassador for Christ," declared that if the Lord were present He would say, in relation to that Act of the Assembly, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto Me," adding, "I am firmly persuaded that, if a remedy is not provided, that Act will very soon terminate in the overthrow of the Church of Scotland, and of a faithful ministry therein, in regard that the power of electing ministers is thereby principally lodged in the hands of a set of men that are generally disaffected to the power of godliness, and to the doctrine, discipline, worship, and government of this Church." This sermon gave deep offence to the greater part of the ministers who heard it in the Synod, and they voted that the preacher should be rebuked for his boldness, against which sentence he appealed to the next Assembly.

CHAPTER VII.

SECESSION.

"Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!"—JER. xv. 10.

"NO meeting of Assembly since the Union," says Dr Thomson, "had been anticipated with such proud and eager anxiety, as that which was convened at Edinburgh, May 3rd, 1733. When the case of Mr Erskine was called, he was ready at the bar, and three friends were by his side—William Wilson, minister of Perth, Alexander Moncrieff, minister of Abernethy, and James Fisher, minister of Kinclaven. There was no trembling of heart as he looked round on the darkening faces of his enemies or to an uncertain future, and he pled his cause without trepidation, in a document which, "for pointed brevity of statement," we quote again from Dr Thomson, "triumphant argument, clear elucidation of great principles, respectful address, combined with inde-

pendence of feeling, deserves to be ranked among the most valuable ecclesiastical documents of the age."

"A watchman," says Mr Erskine in one part, "must exoner himself, upon the peril of his soul. 'Tis true he ought not knowingly to sound a false alarm. But whether is it safer for the city to have a false alarm sounded upon an apprehended danger, or to have the mouth of the watchman stopt that he cannot sound an alarm, when the danger is real and the city falling into the hands of the enemy?"

By a majority of votes, the Assembly "approve of the proceedings of the Synod, and appoint the minister of Stirling to be rebuked and admonished at their own bar, in order to terminate the process." This sentence was accordingly carried out.

In this state of matters, Mr Erskine did not hesitate; but produced a paper in which he protested against the censure that had been passed upon him, and craved that it should be read and recorded in the minutes of Assembly. To this protest his own name and those of his three brethren were affixed. This request was refused, and the brethren left the paper on the table and withdrew.

Very probably, at this stage the matter might have ended, had it not been for one of those incidental circumstances on which often great and important events hang. The paper on which the protest was written having fallen from the table, was picked up

by one of the members,—a wild, fiery man—who rose up in a heat of passion, and pronounced it treasonable to their court.

The Assembly was roused to a state of indignation, and ordered the ministers to answer for their protest before the ensuing Commission, or else they must cease to be ministers of the Church of Scotland.

When the day of Commission arrived, one who was an eye-witness of the scene, a youth named Adam Gib, afterwards well-known in the Secession Church, says of the appearance of Mr Erskine, "I saw him then standing at the bar, in a most easy and undaunted, yea, majestic appearance, amidst warm and brow-beating reasonings against the refusal which he then made, particularly by the Earl of Isla. Before the Commission found themselves obliged to reverse their forenoon resolution against receiving any written answers to their question, a proposal was agreed to for allowing him to read such parts of his representation as contained a direct answer to their question. The paper being then handed over to him, he entered upon the reading of it, beginning with the address and title. The Moderator immediately stopped him, telling him that he was to read only such parts as contained a direct answer to the question. Mr Erskine replied that these would come in due order." So he read on.

His paper was a "masterly production." It set forth, in a few sentences, the kingly office of Christ, with the

spiritual nature of His kingdom, and the duty of its ministers to be faithful in the discharge of their high calling, to preserve purity in the Church, etc.

This fair and conclusive reasoning was of no avail; the minds of most of the ministers were wrapped and clouded in anger, and they set about "suspending the four brethren from the exercise of the ministerial function, and all the parts thereof."

To this sentence, Mr Erskine and his friends protested, declaring that it was *null and void*, and at once betook themselves to the discharge of all their pastoral duties. Mr Erskine, even on his road home from the Commission, assisted at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper at Queensferry, giving out in the opening of his address the following lines of the fifty-third Psalm, with some appropriate observations on them:—

> "*My closed lips, O Lord by Thee*
> *Let them be opened;*
> Then shall Thy praises by my mouth
> Abroad be published.

It was three months until the next meeting of Commission before which the four brethren were cited to appear, and public sympathy was rapidly extending in their favour. At the meeting a spirit of conciliation prevailed; many presbyteries implored that the four brethren might be treated with clemency and forbearance, and some had even the courage to say that

the infliction of the sentence of suspension had been "a stretching of Church authority." As for the brethren, they gave no sign of compromise, but intimated, in calm language, their adherence to all their former representation and protest, and acknowledged frankly that, deterred by no voice, no censure, they had as before exercised all the parts of their sacred office.

The Commission was divided on the subject, many of the brethren insisting that the matter should be allowed to drop; while others wished it to be carried further. The question was put before the house, and only by the casting vote of the Moderator was it carried against the four brethren, and instructions given that they should proceed to give a higher censure to the offending parties.

There seemed now no manner of doubt that an important crisis was at hand, and many were anxious to delay this crisis as long as they could. They appointed a Committee to meet with the suspended ministers, to smooth over difficulties, and persuade them to submit to the Church. But no proposal was made to them which did not involve a sacrifice of principle; and they, feeling that the cause of truth and liberty was at stake if they departed in the very least from the ground they had taken, declared themselves incapable of agreeing to the proposal.

The crisis had now come; the brethren would not retract, and the majority of the Commission, being

determined to punish them, rose up and thrust them out of the Established Church, declaring their charges vacant after the date of the sentence. "Thus," says Dr Thomson, whom we have before quoted, "these holy men and faithful witnesses, who had vented no heresy, who stood unchallenged with any immoral act, who had done violence to no constitutional law, whose only fault had been their faithful testifying against repeated growing defections in doctrine and government, their endeavouring to bring back the Church to that purer model to gain which her first martyr had burned and her last martyr had bled, and especially their continuing to protest and refusing to be silent against a measure which even the most unscrupulous partisan of modern times will admit to have been unconstitutionally passed and irregularly imposed, were driven from a Church whose doctrines they had loved, and whose order they venerated, denuded of their office, exposed to privacy, and branded with reproach."

"The reading of the sentence carried a pang of sorrow to the heart of some of the most faithful of those ministers who had sat in the Commission. They felt, with many of the rulers around them who had joined in passing the unrighteous decree, that their only bond of connection was ecclesiastical and external; while with those whom they now saw driven forth it was spiritual, enduring, and perpetual."

After the sentence of their expulsion was announced to them, they read a protest which freely gave forth their opinions, and then handed it to the clerk. After so doing, they walked out of the Commission, with heavy hearts, but clear consciences, that they had only done their duty, when they sacrificed love and unfaithful silence to expulsion and a dark future, for which they knew not of any provision. They would have been willing to remain, had they been able to do so, and cultivate the vineyard to which they had been called; but a degenerate Church cast them forth, for they would not dishonour the crown rights of their Divine Lord.

We know what Secession is in our times. A man can be a Seceder and yet lose nothing of his prestige, but in these old days it was different. Secession was an untried thing, and they could not forecast the consequences of such an act. Besides a sort of halo hung around the National Church, which impressed the multitudes with a feeling of awe and respect. Notwithstanding all this, they felt that God had given them a commission to bear testimony for the truth; and so, like Abraham, they obeyed the call, "not knowing whether they went." As I said at the beginning, they never thought, when they began the opposition, of forming a new sect; they were led on step by step, by Him whose "way is in the sea and His path amidst great waters," and the Secession was

the result of these measures, God intending, through these men and their successors, to keep the lamp of His Gospel burning in an otherwise darkened country; for soon the Established Church of the land was given up to a reign of dead Moderatism, and only, with a few exceptions, where the Seceders were placed was there light in the dwellings of the righteous.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY—BURGHERS AND ANTI-BURGHERS.

"But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God."—1 THES. ii. 2.

ON the 5th of December 1733, about three weeks after their expulsion from the Established Church, the four brethren met at Gairney Bridge, a small village near Kinross, to consult with one another as to the steps it would be necessary for them to take in the circumstances. The four were joined by Messrs. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, and Thomas Mair of Orwell, who took no part in their proceedings. The first day was entirely occupied by prayer and devout exercise; but on the second they constituted themselves into a Presbytery, and Mr Ebenezer Erskine was chosen Moderator, while Mr James Fisher was appointed clerk. They called themselves *The Associate Presbytery.*

As they had no intention, when they left the Establishment, to close the door for ever on their return to it, should the opportunity occur, and should it be re-

formed, they continued to maintain their testimony on the ground they first adopted; and before parting, they appointed Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff to prepare an extended statement of the reason of their protestation before the Commision.

This happened in 1733, but not until the Assembly of 1740 was the door closed effectually against the return of the seceding ministers, whose ranks, having been joined by other two, made eight in all. Between these times, fruitless attempts had been made to recall them to the Church; but as it would not abate one inch in its demands for implicit, unquestioning obedience to its rule, however unwarrantable, they would not submit to return; and so, in 1740 the Assembly proceeded to "depose" them from the office of the holy ministry. Before this they had only been "suspended."

Up till this date they had retained their places of worship and emoluments from the State, but now the civil authorities in their respective districts were instructed to deprive them of both.

At Stirling, on the first Sabbath after the sentence was passed, Mr Erskine found the doors of his church and the churchyard locked against him and his people. An immense multitude were gathered together, and were about to proceed to violence, when the venerable minister, taking the Bible in his hand, which had been brought from his house, in a majestic manner retired

to a quiet place in the neighbourhood, the vast assembly following him in profound silence.

To this day, the spot he chose is pointed out to the stranger. It was on a green knoll, below the frowning ramparts of the castle, that he gathered together his congregation; and after protesting that, in doing what he did he was only obeying the dictates of duty, he proceeded with the services of the day.

It was a grand and impressive scene, and we can imagine the feelings of the congregation, as the roll of the fine old psalm with which he commenced his service was borne away on the breeze, and wafted up to heaven. It was the first part of the sixtieth Psalm—

> "O Lord, Thou hast rejected us,
> And scattered us abroad;
> Thou justly hast displeased been,
> Return to us, O God.
> The earth to tremble Thou hast made,
> Therein didst breaches make;
> Do Thou thereof the breaches heal,
> Because the land doth shake."

After a solemn prayer offered up to God, he read out for his text, Matt. viii. 27, "But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Dr M'Kerrow, in his "History of the Secession Church," says, "many have been heard to speak of the discourses of that day with mingled emotions of vexation and delight,

—vexation at the unjust treatment which their minister received in being driven from his church, and delight at the recollection of the solemn truths which on that occasion were uttered by him with more than his ordinary earnestness."

The mental portraiture of the four fathers of the Secession was thus given by one of themselves, Mr Wilson, when asked by a friend, in a pleasant humour, to do so :—"Our brother, Mr Erskine, has the face of a man. Our friend, Mr Moncrieff, has the face of a lion. Our neighbour, Mr Fisher, has the face of an eagle. And as for myself, I think you will all own I may claim to be the ox, for, as you know, the laborious part of the business falls to my share."

An unhappy difference arose, soon after the Secession, between the Erskines and one who was accomplishing much good for Britain, viz., George Whitefield. Hearing of Whitefield's extraordinary success, the Erskines wrote him, and informed him of their proceedings and trials, to which the English evangelist replied in terms of high respect and affection, and longed for personal intercourse with them. This was followed by an invitation for him to come and visit them, Ebenezer writing to him thus—"It would be unreasonable to propose or urge that you should incorporate as a member of our Presbytery, and wholly embark in every branch of our Reformation, unless the Father of Lights were clearing your way thereunto,

which we pray He may enlighten in His time, so as you and we may see eye to eye. All intended by us at present is, that when you come to Scotland, your way may be such as not to strengthen the hands of our corrupt clergy and judicatories. . . . We preach not upon the call and invitation of the ministers, but of the people, which I suppose is your own practice now in England, and should this also be your way, when you come to Scotland, it could do the Associate Presbytery no manner of harm."

Whitefield came, but would not co-operate with the Church party in Edinburgh until he had conferred with the Seceders. Mr Ralph Erskine met him in Edinburgh, and went with him to Dunfermline, where an interview took place. From the statements of the case, we can see that the Seceders expected more from Whitefield than was reasonable considering his views as an evangelist, and a rupture was the consequence. Paul and Barnabas differed and parted, and we know not if ever they met again; and it is painful to think that, after this, all personal intercourse between Erskine and Whitefield seems to have ceased, though the latter retained a favourable impression of the father of Secession, as seen by a letter which he afterwards wrote to one of Mr Erskine's sons, in which he says, "I wish all were like-minded with your honoured father and uncle, matters then would not be carried on with so high a hand."

After this took place the Cambuslang Revival, under the preaching of Whitefield, from which the Seceders unhappily stood aloof, and many rash and bitter things were said on both sides, for which the authors, in a cooler moment, expressed sorrow; and though Mr Erskine took no part in framing the Act of the Associate Presbytery on the subject, he was the Moderator at the time.

One of the most valuable doctrines put forth by the Secession Church was drawn up at this period, namely, their famous Act concerning the doctrine of grace; and Mr Erskine, being the senior member was deputed to frame it. "This Act," says Dr Thomson, "is distinguished by those clear exhibitions of a free Gospel resting on the basis of an all-perfect atonement —those representations of 'grace reigning through righteousness,' and producing, in the reception of it, the spirit of an unconstrained and happy obedience, which gives strength to personal holiness, and its greatest power to a Christian ministry. It was well that such an Act should at once strike the key-note of Secession preaching."

When the Rebellion broke out, in 1745, Mr Erskine took an active part in support of the Government; and, animated by his example, the Seceders of Stirling flew to arms and were formed into a regiment for the defence of the town. In his life, by Fraser, we are told that "one night when the rebels were expected

to make an attack on the town, Mr Erskine presented himself in the guard-room, fully accoutred in the military garb of the time. Dr John Anderson, late Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Glasgow, and Mr John Burns, teacher, father of the Rev. Dr Burns, Barony Parish, in that city, happened to be on guard the same night, and, surprised to see the venerable clergyman in this attire, recommended him to go home to his prayers as more suitable to his vocation. "I am determined," was his reply, "to take the hazard of the night along with you, for the present crisis requires the *arms* as well as the *prayers* of all good subjects."

Shortly after this a question arose which rent the Secession into two bodies. An irritating matter was introduced into the Synod, respecting the taking of the burgess oath, which was required to be taken in some of the towns of Scotland—Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Perth. The clause was this, "Here I protest, before God and your Lordships, that I profess and allow with my heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorised by the laws thereof; I shall abide therein and defend the same till my life's end, renouncing the Roman Catholic religion called Papistry." Some asserted that this oath could not and should not be taken by any consistent Seceder; while others insisted that it should be made a matter of mutual forbearance.

The debate on this matter grew so stormy, that, in 1747, the contending parties were split into two distinct bodies, Burghers and Anti-burghers. It was sad that those who had stood together, and nobly fought for the pure and true, should thus be separated; but it has ever been thus in the Church. Luther and Zwingle differed about the sacraments at the very time when the enemy was ready to fall upon them, and, in like manner, the Covenanters fought about trifles on the very battlefield. Well does the wise man say, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contensions are like the bars of a castle." And thus, "The Lord had divided them in His anger, and covered the daughter of Zion with a thick cloud, giving them also the wine of astonishment to drink."

After this, the history of the Secession Church is divided into two different sections.

Mr Erskine's views were those of the Burgher party, regarding the lawfulness of taking the oath. He was more temperate than others of his brethren, and amidst the troubles and contentions stayed himself upon God, who had been his help from his youth till now. At this time and of this occasion, he writes, "Here is comfort, that the great Manager of the house is looking on; He permits and overrules all these confusions and disorders, for His own holy and wise ends, for the trial of faith and patience, and to show

His own skill in bringing order out of confusion; and when He has performed His whole work in Mount Zion and Jerusalem, He will reign among His ancients gloriously."

CHAPTER IX.

HIS LAST DAYS AND DEATH.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."—Ps. xxxvii. 37.

MR ERSKINE was now an old man, infirmities were increasing upon him, bereavements, too, were to be his lot ere he closed his wilderness journey.

On the 15th March 1751 he lost his second wife, and his dear brother Ralph the year following. When the intelligence of his brother's death reached him, he said, with emotion, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start of me; he was first in Christ, and now he is first in glory." In a letter to a friend about the same time, he writes, "Many of God's billows are going over me, yet still I hope the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the day-time, and His song shall be with me in the night."

At the commencement of 1752 he had the happiness of seeing his nephew, Mr James Erskine, ordained as his colleague, and was able to preach on that occasion, though his strength was now giving way. The next

year, at the earnest wish of his people, he rose from his bed and preached to them from Job xix. 23, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

About this time, he penned his last letter, to his daughter Alice, wife of the Rev. James Scott, Gateshall. In it he says, "My nephew, James, read me your letter to him yesterday, which brought me under a new sympathy with you on account of the death of your dear uncle Ralph, and the staggering condition of your father. According to the course of nature, it was my turn to have gone off before him. But the will of the good and sovereign God has determined otherwise, and that I should tarry behind for a while in this weary wilderness. It seems I am not yet made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of saints in light, but need to be more beaten in the wilderness with the hammer of affliction, before I come to the upper temple and sanctuary. But good is the will of the Lord.

"As for the state of my health, about which you appear so anxious, I bless the Lord I have no formed sickness; only, I have borne, and am still so much afflicted with pain, that I am still unable to follow the work of the ministry. I am mostly confined to my bed. I sometimes get up, but in a little I am forced to return to my bed, through pain, which abates as to the severity of it whenever I get to bed, in so much that my tottering hand becomes steady, and

both body and mind are more easy. This letter is a proof of what I say, for it is wrote in bed—leaning on my elbow. I could neither have written so much, or so well, had I been sitting at the table. The Lord makes me to sing of mercy on this account, that my bed is made to ease me, and my couch to comfort me; nor am I like Job, scared with dreams or terrified with visions. Many a time my meditations of Him are sweet in the silent watches of the night. Many, many a time, the Lord says, 'I am the Lord thy God.' 'O, my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God.' 'Thine am I, O David, and on Thy side will I be, thou son of Jesse.'"

"On Sabbath last, in the afternoon, as the people were very urgent to see and hear me, I went from my bed to the pulpit; and, after preaching half-an-hour from the words, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' I returned from the pulpit to my bed again. I begin to weary on my elbow.—Your affectionate father, "E. ERSKINE.

The closing scene we give in the words of his biographer, Dr Fraser:—

"His last sermon was literally preached from his bed to a company assembled in his room, where he baptised a child, after discoursing on a text with which he had particularly wished to finish his ministry, viz., Psalm xliii. 14, 'This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our God even unto death.'

"His private conversation with relatives and other kind inquirers, during his last illness, was at once cheerful and edifying. He often expressed himself in language to this effect:—'I have always found my times of sore affliction my best times. Many blasts I have endured through life; but I had this comfort under them—a good God, a good conscience, a good cause.' When one of his elders thus accosted him: 'Sir, you have given us many good advices; may I ask now what you are now doing with your own soul?' 'I am just doing with it,' he replied, 'what I did forty years ago; I am resting on that word, "I am the Lord thy God."' Another friend, surprised at the serenity and cheerfulness he possessed in the immediate view of death and eternity, put the question, 'Sir, are you not afraid of your sins?' 'Indeed no,' was his answer; 'ever since I knew Christ, I have never thought highly of my frames and duties, nor am I *slavishly* afraid of my sins.'"

"To another of his relatives who came to see him, and began to comfort him thus: 'I hope you get now and then a *blink* to bear up your spirit under your affliction,' he promptly returned this spirited reply: "Oh, I know more of *words* than of *blinks*. Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. The covenant is my charter; and if it had not been for that blessed word, my hope and strength had perished from the Lord.' To his beloved children he un-

bosomed himself in the most endearing manner, mingling consolation with his dying counsels: 'Though I die, the Lord liveth. I have known more of God since I came to this bed, than through all my life.'

"During the night on which he finished his earthly career, Mrs Fisher, having come from Glasgow to visit her dying father, was sitting in the apartment where he lay, and engaged in reading. Awakened from a slumber, he said, 'What book is that, my dear, you are reading?' 'It is your sermon, father, on the text, "I am the Lord thy God."' 'O, woman,' he answered, 'That is the best sermon ever I preached!' The discourse had proved very refreshing to himself, as to many of his hearers. A few minutes after that expression had fallen from his lips, he requested his daughter to bring the Bible and candle nearer the bed; and having shut his eyes, and laid his hand under his cheek, *he gently breathed out his soul into the hands of his Redeemer*, on the 2nd of June 1754. Had he lived twenty days longer, he would have finished the seventy-fourth year of his age; and had he lived three months more, he would have completed the fifty-first of his ministry, having resided twenty-eight years at Portmoak and nearly twenty-three years at Stirling."

Mr Erskine was buried, by his own desire, in the middle of his meeting-house, where a large stone with a Latin inscription, recording the date of his

death, his age, and the periods of his ministry at Portmoak and Stirling, marks the spot.

"It would be foolish," says Dr Harper, "to claim for Mr Ebenezer Erskine a first place, as a man of intellect or of genius; but we think it must be plain to every candid observer, that no man could have passed through the trying events which were crowded into his personal history, and accomplish what he did, whose mental endowments were not of a superior order. The originator of a great religious movement; a leader in important theological controversies; the vindicator of popular rights; the pulpit orator who thrilled the hearts of thousands; the debater who stood his ground in Church courts, when numbers and authority and the pride of place conspired to browbeat and overbear him,—the person in whom these things were realized—and such was Ebenezer Erskine—must be admitted to have been, in point of capacity, no common man."

"At night," says Augustus Toplady, "I spent three or four hours reading Erskine's Sermons particularly the following ones:—'The Rent Veil of the Temple,' 'The Harmony of the Divine Attributes,' 'The Believer Exalted in imputed Righteousness.' The reading of these sweet discourses was wonderfully blessed to my soul."

LIFE OF RALPH ERSKINE.

BY

JEAN L. WATSON.

Ralph Erskine

RALPH ERSKINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD PURITAN.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—MATT. v. 10.

BEFORE entering upon the life of Ralph Erskine it may be interesting to our readers to know something of his grand old puritan father, the Rev. Henry Erskine, of Cornhill, in Northumberland, and afterwards of Chirnside in Berwickshire.

Henry Erskine was born at Dryburgh, "the seat of the ancient abbey," on the banks of the Tweed, 1624. His father, Mr Ralph Erskine of Shielfield,*

* The old family house of the Erskines of Shielfield, at Dryburgh, was possessed by that family from 1559 till 1793. It was a very old-fashioned building, with an ancient tower at the east end, and was referred to in the old ballad of Hilton Hill—

"Ye foemen, ere you storm this ancient peel,
Their motto see,—remember 'tis "*Think Weel.*"

It is also supposed to be the place to which Sir Walter Scott alludes in the beautiful ballad of the "Eve of St. John."

was a country gentleman related to the Earl of Mar. His family was a large one, consisting of thirty-three children, of whom his son Henry was amongst the younger members. Henry's education was by no means neglected, though a numerous train of brothers and sisters preceded him under the paternal roof. The early proofs he showed of piety and talent, determined his parents to give him every advantage they could afford. The improvement in knowledge and piety in the lad was probably greatly due to the good ministers under whose pastoral care he was privileged to be reared, and he was equally fortunate in his teachers when attending the Edinburgh University, where he received the degree of Master of Arts.

Having carefully studied the Church controversies of that age, he conscientiously and decidedly attached himself to the doctrines of the Scottish Confessions and the Westminster Confession of Faith, and to the Presbyterian forms of worship, discipline, and government. Conformably, therefore, he received license to preach the Gospel from Presbyterian ministers, and was afterwards ordained by ministers of that persuasion.

The place to which Mr Erskine was called after his ordination was Cornhill, a village pleasantly situated on the south bank of the Tweed. Here, his labours were signally blessed, though at first the people were ignorant, ungodly, and rude, as well as

virulent in their hostility to religion. However, by the Divine blessing on his faithful ministrations, they became so warmly attached to him for his Master's sake, that when, by the Act of Uniformity, August 24, 1662, he, in common with two thousand faithful ministers in England, was ejected from his living, his removal was greatly regretted.

This Uniformity Act, which in the reign of Charles II. was introduced into Parliament, and carried by a narrow majority of five in the House of Commons, excluded from the benefices all clergymen who before that date failed to comply with certain conditions. Not only must they renounce the Solemn League and Covenant, and abjure the taking of arms, on any pretence whatever, against the monarch; but, if not already episcopally ordained, they must receive ordination anew from a bishop; they must declare their unfeigned assent to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer, and they must take the oath of canonical obedience to their superiors. The measure was so framed that any member of the obnoxious party of the Puritans could not remain in the Church of England, for the oath not only exacted a strict compliance with the ceremonies of the National Church, but it asked them to acknowledge that their public actings had been a treason.

Bartholomew Day arrived, and upwards of two thousand pulpits were vacated, and amongst them was

Henry Erskine's. By this Act, the Puritans, who for a hundred years had been the lights of the Church of England, were cast forth, and were henceforth to be known as Nonconformists.

For some unknown cause, the emoluments of Erskine's living at Cornhill had been partly, if not altogether withheld, and in order to get redress, he was advised to go to London and make application to the king. The ship in which he embarked having been, from the state of the weather, compelled to put in at Harwich, it was detained three weeks. Mr Erskine was not idle during that time, for the religious people of the town, having heard of his arrival and detention, invited him to preach to them. They were satisfied with the discourses they heard, and on his departure gave him substantial tokens of their gratitude and esteem. On his arrival in London, and presenting his petition to the king, after long waiting, he was dismissed with the ungracious reply that he could not recover his arrears unless he would promise to conform to the Established Church. To this, of course, the dauntless man would not agree. Several Scottish noblemen then offered him benefices on condition of conformity; but all was of no avail, he would rather cast himself and family on the care of Providence, than do anything to violate his duty, or counteract the dictates of conscience.

Setting sail for Leith, with scarcely any money in

his purse after paying his fare, the ship was again constrained to put in at Harwich. It was detained there six weeks, to the no small joy of the people, who gladly welcomed the minister back, and when he left they furnished him with everything requisite for his comfort on his voyage to Scotland.

On reaching that country, he received from his brother a dwelling-house in Dryburgh, where he appears to have resided eighteen years, and where he sometimes exercised the office of the ministry. Owing to the expulsion of a minister from the neighbouring parish of Mertoun, by the Glasgow Act of 1662, and an Episcopal incumbent succeeding him, the services of Mr Henry Erskine were greatly prized. It would seem that this devoted minister was allowed to preach for some time without much annoyance. But, in 1682, in common with many other Presbyterians, he smarted under the severities inflicted on those found "guilty" of keeping conventicles, and of celebrating baptisms and marriages since His Majesty's late Act of Indemnity, 1679.

From this time until the Act of Toleration granted by King James, in 1687, the life of Mr Erskine was one of continual hardship and persecution, and at the same time, of marvellous and great deliverances, a few of which may be noticed, he himself having related them to another ejected minister. One day, shortly after his ejectment from Cornhill, there was

"neither bread, meal, nor money" in his house; the children had awakened early in the morning, crying for food. The father tried to amuse them, and at the same time to encourage his wife to depend upon that Providence "which feeds the young ravens when they cry." While he was thus engaged, a countryman knocked hard at the door, and called for some one to help him off with his load, which Mr Erskine found to be a sack filled with butcher's meat and meal,—an occurence which gave him great encouragement to depend on his bountiful Benefactor in future difficulties.

Another time, when on a visit to Edinburgh, he was reduced to such straits that he had only three halfpence in his pocket. Though standing in need of refreshments, he durst not enter a tavern and call for food, for which he could not pay. As he walked along, perplexed and anxious, a stranger accosted him, and asked him if he were Mr Henry Erskine. Being answered in the affirmative, he then produced a letter in which was enclosed some money, and a note bearing these words, "Sir, receive this from a sympathising friend—farewell." Astonished, he turned to address the stranger, but the man had disappeared, and who he was could never be discovered. On another occasion, his money falling short when he was on a journey on foot, he was in danger of being exposed to much inconvenience; but as he walked over the marshy ground he heard something tinkle at the end

of his staff, and on looking down and examining the spot, he found two half-crowns, which did him good service on the road home.

After the King's proclamation of indulgence, a number of pious Presbyterians residing in the parish of Whitsome and its vicinity gave Mr Erskine a call to be their minister, and there he lived, discharging the duties of his office with much acceptance, until the Revolution in 1688.

One instance of the success of his labours in this place deserves to be noticed—the conversion of Thomas Boston, of Ettrick. "Towards the latter end of summer," says this excellent man himself, "the liberty of conscience being then newly given by King James, my father took me away with him to the Presbyterian meetings in the Newton of Whitsome. There I heard the worthy Mr Henry Erskine, minister of Cornhill before the Restoration; by whose means it pleased the Lord to awaken me, and bring me under exercise about my soul's state; being then going in the twelfth year of my age. Two of Mr Erskine's first texts were John i. 29, 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,' and Matt. iii. 7, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' By them, I judge, God spoke to me. My lost state by nature, and my absolute need of Christ being thus discovered to me, I was set to pray in earnest; I also carefully attended, for ordinary, the

preaching of the Word at Revelaw, where Mr Erskine had his meeting-house, about four miles from Dunse. In the summer-time, company could hardly be missed, and with them, something to be heard, especially in the returning, that was for edification; to which I listened. But in winter, sometimes it was my lot to go alone, without so much as the benefit of a horse to carry me through Blackadder water, the wading whereof in sharp wintry weather I very well remember. But such things were then easy for the benefit of the Word, which came with power."

From Whitsome, Mr Erskine was called to Chirnside, about four miles distant, where he laboured until his death, in August 1696, in the seventy-second year of his age. He was only a fortnight ill. During that time, he frequenty exhorted his children, and assured them that, when standing on the brink of eternity, he did not repent of any hardships he had endured in his Master's service. He was interred in the churchyard of Chirnside, but a monument is erected to his memory in the aisle of the family at Dryburgh Abbey, among his kindred of the House of Mar, and near where lie the bones of the great Border Minstrel.

CHAPTER II.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

"And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."—2 Tim. iii. 15.

MR RALPH ERSKINE was amongst the younger children of the Rev. Henry Erskine of Chirnside. He was born at Monilaws, a village near Cornhill, in the county of Northumberland, March 1685. Of his childhood little is known, but that he was thoughtful and pious, and most probably was devoted by his parents to the work of the ministry from his earliest years. An anecdote is related of him when a little boy at school, how he and his companions often amused themselves rolling stones from the summit of a hill near his father's house. One day when thus employed, he was seized with a violent pain in his arm. His conscience undoubtedly smote him, for he had neglected prayer that morning; so without delay he returned home, and shutting himself up in his room, prayed that if God would pardon him and heal his arm, he would live a better life in future. Before he was done praying, his

arm was healed, and the pain relieved, no doubt from natural causes, still this incident so "endeared the throne of grace to Ralph that it induced him ever after to pour out all his complaints, and cast all his cares on God, who is the hearer of prayer." That prayer was an exercise in which he delighted, in these early days, is seen from an entry on the boards of a note-book—"Lord, put Thy fear in my heart. Let my thoughts be holy, and let me do for Thy glory, all that I do. Bless me in my lawful work. Give a good judgment and memory—a firm belief in Jesus Christ, and an assured token of Thy love."

After acquiring the elements of education, partly at Chirnside and in some of the neighbouring towns, he left for the University of Edinburgh, which he entered in his fifteenth year.

The first season of his attendance at the University was marked by a striking instance of the divine goodness in preserving his life when in imminent peril. At that time, February 1700, the Parliament Square was almost entirely destroyed by fire, and Ralph, happening to lodge in a house in the square, narrowly escaped being burned to death, having forced his way through the flames, with a number of his books.

When a student of divinity, he set out from Fife, where he was then residing, to attend the celebration of the Lord's Supper at Liberton, two miles south from Edinburgh. In the hurry of his departure, he

neglected his usual personal devotions. After crossing the Forth, on his road from Leith he met a poor man, to whom, unsolicited, he gave an alms. The man seemed much affected by this act of kindness, and thanked him sincerely. This circumstance brought to Mr Erskine's mind that expression in Isaiah lxiv. 6, "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not," and he said to himself, "What a mercy will it be if the Lord meet me at Liberton, notwithstanding my omission of duty this morning." His soul was stirred up to earnest prayer for the gracious presence of God; nor did he pray in vain, for on that occasion he was favoured with delightful tokens of the divine presence.

His brother Ebenezer having been ordained minister of Portmoak in May 1703, Ralph appears to have spent most of his summer holidays under his hospitable roof. He afterwards obtained the situation of tutor and chaplain to the family of Lieutenant-Colonel John Erskine, a man justly celebrated for his piety and patriotism. The Colonel was a distant relative of his own, the third son of Henry Lord Cardross, a nobleman also distinguished for his attachment to Presbyterian principles, as well as for his sufferings in the cause of civil and religious liberty.

In that family Ralph seems to have resided, both in Edinburgh and in the retirement of the Colonel's country house near Culross, until his license, about

1709. How faithful he was, to discharge with fidelity the duty that now developed upon him, we see from his diary—"Thursday afternoon, but especially Friday afternoon, when being thoughtful about my concerns with respect to the family, and my duty therein, and towards the children committed to my trust, I went to seek counsel of the Lord how to carry, and was made, with intentness of spirit while praying, to seek that the Lord might give me a sight of my sins. I was made to beg that the Lord would assist and direct me in my carriage with respect to the family and the children committed to my custody in some measure—praying that the Lord might take the glory of all to Himself, by helping me to my work, and profiting the children."

It speaks well for the tutor who thus seeks to promote the glory of God and the good of the young committed to his care, and happy are the young who are placed under the tuition of such a teacher. Colonel Erskine knew the value of the tutor to whom he had entrusted his children, and wrote thus:—"I beg earnestly, that the Lord may bless your good designs to my children; and am fully persuaded, that the right impressions that children get of God and the ways of God, when they are young, is a great help to them in life."

Ralph Erskine was borne down with an overwhelming sense of his unfitness to preach the Gospel, and it

was with great difficulty he could be prevailed upon to make application for license; but his brother and Colonel Erskine did all they could to encourage him to proceed, and cheered him on with their kind sympathies and counsels. At one time, it is said, Ralph went to the top of a hill, near Portmoak, to attempt preaching a sermon alone, and Ebenezer, having followed him and listened unobserved, was highly pleased with his appearance, and returning home in good spirits, said to his wife, "I hope our *calf* (a bashful person) will preach yet."

Encouraged by his friends, the young man went forward and "was entered on trials" by the Presbytery of Dunfermline. All his exercises meeting the approval of the court, and he having subscribed the Confession of Faith, he was admitted to preach the Gospel, "wherever in providence he should be orderly called."

Mr Erskine's high Christian character and his gifts as a preacher soon came to be heard of throughout the neighbourhood, and he received, at much the same time, two or three different calls to churches around. Dunfermline being one of these, he chose it, notwithstanding the prospect of greater labour and difficulty, with inferior emolument. He was consequently ordained to the pastoral office of that town, as colleague and successor to Mr Buchanan, in the twenty-seventh year of his age, and nearly eleven years after the ordination of his brother Ebenezer to Portmoak.

CHAPTER III.

CALL TO THE MINISTRY.

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine."—2 Tim. iv. 2.

DUNFERMLINE, to which Ralph Erskine was called, is a town of great interest in Scotland. It is sometimes mentioned in ballads:—

"The king sits in Dunfermline tower,
Drinking the blood-red wine;
Where shall I find a skeeley skipper
Will sail this ship o' mine?

Or—

"Merry it is in good greenwood,
When the mavis and merle are singing;
But merrier were they in Dunfermline grey,
When all the bells were ringing."

This town is situated in the western district of Fifeshire, about three miles from the Firth of Forth. The name signifies "the tower or fortress of the crooked stream." The town and palace of Dunfermline are in Pittencrieff Glen, a little to the south-west

of the town. The tower, of which only a part remains, is said to have been built by Malcolm Canmore; the palace, a more modern building, now in ruins, was erected by James IV. This palace was the birth place of Charles I. and of his sister Princess Elizabeth, from whom the present royal family of Britain trace their descent. Dunfermline boasts, too, of the ruins of a once-splendid and very ancient Abbey, the churchyard of which succeeded Iona as the place of sepulture of the Scottish kings, many of whom lie here. To this old historic town, the young minister went, and applied himself with unwearied assiduity at once to sacred studies, and to the active services of his office. He redoubled his exertions in pursuit of knowledge and in studying theology in its various branches. He perused with care voluminous systems of divinity, and consulted many commentators, preferring, above all, Matthew Henry. Among others he peculiarly valued were Owen, Manton, Flavel, and Boston. He mentions, with great admiration, a book of Boston's now scarcely heard of, his treatise on the "Covenant of Grace," of which he writes: "July 21, 1739.—That which tended to my reviving at this time was a word from Mr Boston, on the Covenant, particularly about the promise being made to Christ, and how faith might be strengthened by hearing the promise. Even when conscience-waiting sins appeared so as to take away all ground of hope or expectation from the soul

looking to itself; yet, when the promise is pleaded, as made to Christ, who is worthy for whose sake God should do this thing; it created hope, and strengthened the soul. By this means, I say, I was led, especially in secret, to look again to God's holy temple."

The Bible itself, however, was the book he studied oftenest; and when his spirit was wearied with the dust and work of life, to its pure fountain of living waters he ever resorted, to refresh and strengthen him for duties and trials. In this way, not only was his own soul refreshed, but from that store he could help and comfort others.

"His delight in study," says his biographer, Mr Fraser of Kennoway, "was cordial and persevering. The diary includes repeated expressions of regret at the interruptions he met with from company; and frequently did he persist in reading and writing till midnight, sometimes till three or four in the morning. Yet all this indefatigable labour was hallowed and softened by prayer. While he exercised an exemplary diligence in using the proper means of cultivating his talents and augmenting his intellectual stores, probably few ministers have been enabled to maintain a more humble and absolute dependence on the Spirit of God, for direction, strength, and success. His reliance on the Divine aid appears from the following extract from his diary:"—

"*October* 7.—After reading Psalm xxxvii. with some

consideration, I was helped in prayer to look to God in Christ, by way of trust and confidence in Him. I was at a loss to look upon myself as among the number of the righteous spoken of in that psalm. Yet I said, 'Though I have no righteousness nor strength in myself, I desire to lay claim to this,—that *surely in the Lord* have *I righteousness and strength;*' and looking to Him as the propitiation for my sin, and to His blood as the atonement, my heart was sweetly melted and dissolved. On this ground I was made to look for the accomplishment of the promise of God, and my heart was pleased that the promise of the Spirit was to be accomplished daily, yea, every moment; also, my eyes were towards Him for a word this day, being to preach, and not knowing yet what to think of for the subject. I preached on Psalm civ. 34, 'I will be glad in the Lord.' After dinner, going to prayer alone, I was helped anew to seek the Spirit to be as a well springing up and watering me every moment, and to look to the faithful Promiser. In seeking this, my soul melted."

Then the next day, we have the following entry:—"After I had remembered the public abroad and at home, particularly in beseeching the Lord to bless my ministry at Dunfermline, and to remember His word, 'Lo, I am with you,' and to bless what I was preaching on, even *all things being in the hand of Christ,* that He would give evidence of it by His

working powerfully upon many. I was then helped to beg the Spirit constantly to water and watch me. Under a sense of absolute weakness and inability to stand of myself, I was helped, with a heart poured out before God, to declare to Him that, though He was calling me to wait upon Him, yet I could not wait on Him a moment, unless He would water me 'every moment.' I was made to seek assistance, success, strength, and courage, for my work in the congregation, while the Lord called me to the ministry therein, being conscious that my fainting spirit was unfit for any work, if the Lord would not be with me."

Especially on the Sabbath morning, his earnest desires for the Divine presence to aid him in the duties of the sanctuary was intense. Listen to his breathings of heart. April 16th, "This morning, after reading, I went to prayer, under a sense of my nothingness and naughtiness, vileness and corruption, and acknowledged myself 'a beast before God,' and nothing but polluted and rebellious dust, yet looking to God as an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit, who from everlasting to everlasting is God, and always the same, and who manifests Himself in Christ. And, therefore, with holy reverence and with joyful tears, I professed my hope in the word; my hope of the Spirit, because He has said, 'The well of water shall spring up to everlasting life;' my hope of His presence, because He has said, 'Lo, I am with you.' I think He allowed

me some communion with Him in a way of believing, and I was made to cry with tears, 'Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.' I was led, in some suitable manner, under a view of my nothingness, and of God's all-sufficiency, to renounce all confidence in the flesh, and to betake myself solely to the name of the Lord, and there to rest and repose myself." As the result of such earnest supplications, he writes, "This day I was helped in preaching."

When engaged in pulpit preparations, his soul would ascend to heaven in holy desires, and of such he writes, "This day I studied for the solemnity (the Lord's Supper), and while I thought and wrote, sometimes my heart was much lifted up, in viewing the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne."

At the same time, this faithful servant of God is found as ready to praise as pray, and to acknowledge and thank the Lord for help received. One entry in his diary says:—"This morning, after reading, my heart was at more liberty in prayer, and I had much sweetness upon my spirit in looking towards God in the promise, and pleading His covenant and perfections, and in looking to the promise as the promise of God in Christ, concerning the Spirit. I was helped to look to Him for His presence in my ministerial work. And when I went to the Church, I was helped to some believing view of Christ as Mediator and Intercessor, and was helped inwardly in public prayer,

and also helped in preaching on Romans viii. 34, 'Who also maketh intercession for us.'"

Mr Buchanan and Mr Erskine preached regularly three times on Sabbath, and also on Thursday evenings; each taking his turn at the work.

Mr Erskine's sermons were written out in full, and, for the most part, in the delivery he kept pretty close to what he had written. He possessed excellent talents for the pulpit, having a pleasing voice, and winning manners. He particularly excelled in the full and free offers of Christ he made to his hearers, and in the persuasive and attractive manner in which he urged their acceptance of the offer so graciously made to them on the authority of the divine Word. Over and above, from his own varied and extensive experience, he possessed a great knowledge of the human heart, and had a singular gift of speaking to the peculiar circumstances of his hearers, which rendered him more than ordinarily popular.

In conformity with the prevailing practice of the Scottish clergy in that age, he considered the exposition of a portion of sacred writ on the Lord's day an essential part of the service. In the early years of his ministry, as his MSS. show, he expounded the Gospels by Matthew and Mark, and the Acts of the Apostles, and afterwards began to explain the Epistles.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS MINISTERIAL LABOURS.

"Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts; so shall I talk of Thy wondrous works."—Psalm cxix. 27.

WE saw, in the life of Ebenezer Erskine, how much the feast of the Lord's Supper was valued in those days. That sacred institution was celebrated generally once a year, and Dunfermline, on these occasions, was crowded by strangers from all parts of the kingdom, many of whom, to the day of their death, spoke with transport of the enlargement of heart they had there experienced. The number of the worshippers was such that it was impossible to find lodgings for them, and not a few spent the whole night in the churchyard, or on the banks of the adjoining rivulet, employing themselves in pious conference and prayer. We have the key to this outpouring of the Spirit at that time from the journal of the pastor. "June 6th," he writes, "this morning, after wakening, I had some thoughts that this might be the last action sermon that ever I might have, and I was affected. I read Psalm lxvii. with

some application and affection, and then prayed, and had my heart poured out in prayer. I was made to wrestle with Him for His promised presence, for His Spirit and blessing. I sought his presence particularly on this occasion, and that the Spirit might be sent to glorify Christ as the Lamb of God in the midst of the throne; expressing my hope."

Then again he records blessings received on these occasions in answer to prayer. "Has not God declared His name," says he, "and saved His people, by giving sweet experience of His powerful presence among us, even in our day, particularly on solemn sacramental occasions? Hath not the Lord sometimes shewn Himself, and discovered His glory in the sanctuary, even here? I remember that at the first communion in Dunfermline, after the Lord had brought me, in His holy providence, to this place, He led me to speak in the evening on that word, 'The name of the city, from that day, shall be Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there,'—Ezek. xlviii. 35. Although many here were not then born, yet there are many people witnesses to attest that, from time to time, from sacrament to sacrament, God hath been pleased to show forth something of His glory. He saved, He showed Himself, He declared His name; therefore ye are His witnesses that he is God, that He is the God of Bethel, that He is the same God, the same immutable God."

It was not at Dunfermline and Portmoak alone that

these sacramental seasons were blessed. We read of one at Abernethy, in 1735, at which Mr Ralph Erskine and other godly ministers took part; and as not only Mr Erskine's services there are seen, but a glimpse is also given of the religious feeling of the Scottish poor at that time, we cannot refrain from quoting pretty fully. The writer of the description says, "I refrained from going forward to several tables, till at length I heard Mr Ralph Erskine serve a table, when he spoke to many cases a believer might be in, and to mine among the rest. He showed that in Christ there is a particular thing answering the particular case of every believer, which he showed in every case he mentioned, and declared, that it is not sufficient to take Christ wholly to answer our sins wholly, by the lump, but that we must make use of particular things in Christ to answer our particular cases and necessities. I heard these observations with pleasure, and tried to lay them up in my heart, and then I was determined to venture forward to the Lord's Table.

"After the tables were served, and the communicating work over, Mr Ralph Erskine, without any interval, preached on Psalm cxix. 81, 'My soul waiteth for Thy salvation, but my hope is in Thy word.' I heard some parts of that sermon with satisfaction, but when he was illustrating other parts, I was afraid the ground of the hypocrite's hope was mine, so that I was very unsteady. When the work was concluded,

about twelve o'clock, and I had got supper, I felt indisposed in the time of private worship. Though I struggled against it, yet drowsiness prevailed."

"*Monday, 23rd June.*—Having risen from private worship, I went out to the yards (gardens) of Abernethy on the north side of the town, to secret worship, about two in the morning, where I marvelled to hear the whole town ringing like a hive of bees, with prayer—the like I had never before heard, but my heart was lifted up with it. The people were so numerous that I could scarcely find a place, even although it was raining. I lay down, however, at the side of growing lint, and I really had in my own apprehension some liberty and freedom."

No less conscientious was Mr Erskine in other parts of his ministerial work. "On a Friday evening," he says, "I visited at Pittencrieff, and before I went out, looked to the Lord for His blessing and conduct. Again, "Remembering that this day I was to begin examination, I was made to look to Him that hath said, 'Lo I am with you,' to plead for His promised presence, both in the beginning, and progress of this work. Knowing and professing that the work would be but unpleasant to me and unprofitable, unsuccessful among the people, unless He should be with me; and desiring to hope for His presence because of His own promise, and for His Spirit as a Spirit of light, life, liberty, and power." One evening a few weeks after,

he says, "This day I went to Masterton to examine. By the way I was helped to pray on horseback, and my meditation on God was sweet. I sought of Him that He would help me in my work. I thought if He would pity any poor soul, He would get more glory than by sun, moon, and stars—the glory of his grace and mercy; and I was made to look to a promising God."

His public examinations were prepared for by much study, and he sought by them to awaken the careless from their false security. When he did not find them properly attended, he spared not reproof, as the following words will show, that he delivered from the pupit in 1717:—

"I believe that it is for ordinary the most ignorant people that are most averse from waiting on these diets of examination. Those means of knowledge, however, that you now enjoy, will rise up in the judgment against you, in the day of the Lord. Wilful ignorance, when people may have the means of knowledge, is a sin that will bring on a double and dreadful damnation. 'It is a people of no understanding; therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will show them no favour.' People may sometimes be more edified at one diet of examination than at the preaching; and if people neglect these means let their blood be upon their own head. We can go to God and say, 'Lord,

we would have taught that people as we were able, by Thy grace, but they would have none of our teaching. They neglected the means of instruction, and cared not for our endeavours, so that it is not our fault, if they perish in their ignorance, and be damned for neglecting the great salvation.' Mind what our Master said, 'He that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me.' I find the worst of you all, sirs, that care not a straw for ministers or means in time of health, yet crying for ministers and means of grace and salvation, when the cold hand of death is taking a grip of you. I'll assure you it is an ill-chosen time, when possibly you have no strength to speak to us, and we have no time to speak to you; and God may leave your conscience to fill you with horror, and to roar upon you. . . . I love not, sirs, to preach of wrath and hell; but I see so many people running that way through their slighting the road that leads to Heaven, that I am resolved you shall not have it to say hereafter, that you had a minister who never told you where you were going. Nay, you shall rather have it to say, 'Our ministers told us to flee from the wrath to come.'"

CHAPTER V.

LABOURS—Continued.

"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience."

WHILE attending to the grown-up people of his flock, Mr Erskine did not over-look the young. We have again and again notices such as these:—"This day I examined the children of the town, according to the proposal on Sabbath," or, "I examined the children in church;" and one of his note-books contained a series of questions and an address, which shows his plain, earnest, and affectionate manner with them, a specimen of which may be given—

"*Q.* 1.—Are you so young that you may not be sick and die? Are young folk exempted from death, and the grave from swallowing you up, more than those that are older? Have you not seen infants laid in the cold dust?

"*Q.* 2.—Can you be good too soon? Can you love God and mind your soul too soon—is not youth the usual time of conversion? An old sinner converted is a miracle that God works but now and then.

"O then, delay not! By beginning early, you will prevent a multitude of sins, and a multitude of sorrows; you will have a stock of prayers, and a stock of grace laid up. Be afraid of that word, Job, xiii. 26, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.'

"Consider that you are poisoned in your nature, defiled as soon as born, as soon as conceived. You have plague-spots on your heart. Can you delay, while these are calling away your souls? Can you be careful about many things, and forget the one thing necessary? Consider also what a great honour and happiness it is to be an old disciple. O how comfortable it will be, to feel the weight of the crown of glory, and the richness of your robes according to the years of service.

"Does any say, 'You would have me religious but I have no power, I can do nothing, I cannot even think a good thought?' Answer.—You even swear and lie, and you say you cannot read and pray. Do you think that God will be satisfied with such an excuse? or can you satisfy your own conscience to think you have done all you can, or should do? Has not God enough to condemn you, in that you have not done what you could and what you may? Never pretend, therefore, you were not able, while you have not done what you could.

"Christ's complaint is, 'Ye will not come to me that

ye might have life' (John v. 40). Do you ask, How shall we come to Him? It is said, verse 39, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me.' So that one of the ways of winning to Christ is by reading and searching the Scriptures. Prayer is another way. All that came to Christ for help and healing came praying, with the blind man, 'Jesus thou son of David have mercy on me;' or with the leper, 'Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou can'st make me clean;' or with Peter, when ready to sink in the waters, 'Lord save me.' There is no coming to Christ, it is true, but by faith, or believing; nor can any come to Christ, except the Father draw them. But yet, as the common road that faith takes in coming to Christ is in the duty of reading and praying, so the common channel wherein the drawing power of the Spirit runs, is in the use of these very means. Let young and old, therefore, be diligent in reading and praying, and so in coming to Christ in that road, perhaps He will sometime or other tell you,—'When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee.' And if you hold on in that road, He may say to you, as He said to Nathanael, 'Thou shalt see greater things than these' (John i. 50). 'Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not' (Jer. xxxiii. 3). Those things which He hides from the wise and prudent, He reveals unto babes (Matt. xi. 25)."

In like manner was the interest Erskine showed in the sick, dying, or bereaved in his flock; also for the tempted and disconsolate. Many notices in his journal show us this. At one place he says, "This evening in secret my heart was composed and enlarged. I was also disposed towards sympathy with Gask's family, they having a pleasant child dead this day." Or again, "This day, being called to see John Black, our precentor's son, I went, and was helped and quickened in prayer for the child. My heart was kindly engaged to look to the Lord in behalf of the child." Or this, "I was raised to see Mrs Meldrum dying, and as I was sweetly helped in prayer last night, so going out to Mrs M., I was helped to speak and pray with her; and after I had been with her a while, went to see another dying saint, Elizabeth Cleland. After I came home, I went to my knees, and was helped, especially in behalf of Mrs M., to plead His covenant and promise."

Neither did he forget or neglect those unhappy individuals whose crimes rendered them victims to public justice, as appears from several entries in his diary:—

Once he says, "My eyes were towards God in His promise; I went to the prison and dealt with the condemned man to confess and give God glory."

At another time, when attending a criminal to the scaffold, Mr Erskine smote on his breast, and uttered these words—"But for restraining grace, I had been

brought by this corrupt heart to the same condition with this unhappy man."

The most unpleasant part of a minister's duty is connected with discipline, and in the large parish of Dunfermline offences not unfrequently occurred requiring the delinquents to be dealt with, to bring them to repentance. Mr Erskine considered it his undisputable duty to deal with such; but though this faithful reprover was stern in his rebukes, his severity was softened by tenderness and affection. If any of his elders assumed a tone of harshness, he was wont to check them, with, "Remember Him who has compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way."

To incite members of session to diligence and faithfulness in the discharge of duty, Mr Erskine drew up the following list of questions:—

1. Do you keep up the worship of God in your family, and endeavour it morning and evening?

2. Do you visit the sick in your own quarter, and pray with them?

3. Do you attend the monthly meetings of the session, except in cases of necessary absence?

4. Do you endeavour to bring in no subject that may divert from duty in these meetings?

5. Do you search out scandals that you hear of in your several quarters?

6. Do you inquire for certificates from persons

coming from other congregations, that live in your quarters?

7. Do you take care of the poor in your quarters, and duly apply for them when you know that they are really needy?

8. Do you keep the session's private affairs; and make it your business, before the dispensing of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to inquire into the conversation of every one in your quarter, that apply for tokens?

The two ministers were zealously countenanced by the elders in their attempts to maintain order in the parish. The session often made efforts to check the profanation of the Sabbath, the revellings at "penny weddings," and other evils; and it seems to have been the custom of a few of the elders and constables, during public worship on Sabbath to walk about and try to curb disorderly persons that neglected divine ordinances, or otherwise desecrated that holy day.

The poor also came under their consideration, and many plans were tried for their relief. At last they fell back on the old custom, as being the best, of having collections at church-doors on the diets of worship.

The session seemed often to be called together for the purpose of prayer and spiritual conference, as well as for the exercise of discipline, the management of the poor, and for their religious meetings. Mr

Erskine has some such notices in his diary—"Nov. 9. —The session met for prayer in my room, being the first Monday of the month. I prayed last; was strengthened and helped therein." And again, "This evening, the meeting (of the elders) being in my room, we were helped to some very heavenly conversation about Christ and His glory, and the glory of His everlasting kingdom. I prayed last, and was strengthened in praise, and enlarged to bless the Lord for Christ and His Gospel, and the Covenant; and for the Spirit, the Comforter—the promise of the Spirit, and the performance of the promise in part; and for Christ being at the right hand of God, and for the expediency of His going away, that He might send the Spirit; and also for this, that the government of the Church and its concerns is in the hands of Christ, and on His shoulders; and that the tongues and hearts, and wrath of men are in His hand."

It would also appear from his journal, that amongst the private members of his congregation there were meetings for prayer and religious conversation, called "Fellowship Meetings,' at which the minister sometimes presided, and so of one he writes—"This evening, in the *fellowship meeting*, as I was helped in conversation, so in prayer my heart and lips were somewhat opened, and my soul quickened in the duty." Before closing this chapter, it may be interesting to give a minute from the Records of Presbytery of Dunfermline.

There had been a presbyterial visit of his parish, July 2, 1716, of which it is said,—"Mr Erskine having preached on his ordinary, being 2 Cor. v. 14, was asked if he had made timeous intimation of this meeting, to which he answered in the affirmative. Then he was removed, and the presbytery, having considered his sermon, did approve thereof. Then elders and heads of families were called, and the usual questions anent his soundness in doctrine, diligence, piety, and orderly walk being asked, they all declared their great satisfaction with him on these heads. He was called in, and this was intimated to him, and he was encouraged to go on in his Master's work."

CHAPTER VI.

MR ERSKINE AS A COLLEAGUE.

"Behold how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.—PSALM cxxxiii. 1.

MR ERSKINE was ordained, as we have seen, minister of Dunfermline, in 1711, by the unanimous wish of the people, and also, by the earnest desire of the senior pastor, Mr Buchanan. These two colleagues seem to have laboured most harmoniously together until the death of Mr Buchanan, four years afterwards. Sometime after this, his surviving colleague was unanimously appointed to succeed him as first minister of the parish, and a few years after, Mr James Wardlaw was chosen as second minister, in Mr Erskine's room. A hearty welcome was given to the new minister by his colleague, who expressed himself happy to receive the assistance of a fellow-labourer so worthy of his esteem, and so much beloved and respected by the people.

United by the bonds of Christian friendship, and deeply impressed with the importance of entire harmony in their work, the two colleagues drew up and

subscribed a bond of mutual agreement, at the beginning of their pastoral connection; and the brotherly concord thus pledged was happily maintained for a long period of time. They did, however, fall out in course of time, when Mr Erskine seceded from the national Church.

In many notices in Mr Erskine's diary we find numerous proofs of the high esteem these two good men entertained for each other.

In one place he said,—"In the time of my colleague's *action* sermon upon the sufferings of Christ, the Lord gave me much of a sweet melting frame in looking towards a crucified Christ, and many heart-melting actings of faith, which dissolved me in tears in hearing. Then I went down to the table with my colleague, and had, I may say, communion with God through Christ in a way of believing, both while the psalm was singing and while the words of instruction were reading, and in the distribution of the elements. And when I received the elements, I had many distinct actings of faith upon Christ, such as made me melt before God, viewing Him as a promising God, and laying hold upon His faithfulness. After communicating, I served two tables, and was helped therein. Then I went into the house, and shutting up myself in a closet, poured out my heart in thankful acknowledgement of the Lord's goodness and mercy, and expressed my confidence in Him through Christ as a promising God, who

had allowed me to apply. I preached in the evening on Ezek. xliii. 12,—'This is the law of the house. Upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold this is the law of the house.' My doctrine was, that universal holiness is so much the law of God's house, and the whole family, being privileged with access to a most holy place, are under the strongest obligations to be a most holy people. Lord glorify Thy name."

Again,—"Helped in hearing my colleague, to hear with some application of the testament confirmed by the death of the testator; helped in prayer, when he prayed for the blessing on the elements, while I sat at the Lord's table; helped to look towards Jesus with a mourning, weeping eye; helped to look to Him in the promise of the Spirit, and in the promise of His presence. My heart was humbled and poured out before the Lord at the table, and I assisted immediately afterwards in serving two tables."

Not only did these colleagues attend upon one another's ministrations with delight, but they also helped and encouraged one another in conducting matters of discipline and order in the parish. Amongst other clerical friends around, Mr Erskine, in like manner, was on the most intimate and affectionate terms. They met often on sacramental occasions, where they mingled sweet and confidential intercourse, both in public and private.

Then as regarded Church matters, ardently attached to divine truth, he was on all occasions its dauntless advocate. In the case of Professor Simson, noticed in the life of Ebenezer Erskine, he stood up manfully for the regular exercise of discipline, both in the first and second process. Then, in that well-known case of dispute and animosity in the Church of Scotland, the *Oath of Abjuration*, his sentiments entirely coincided with those of his brother Ebenezer. He strongly objected to it, and expressed his disapprobation in a poem he wrote on the coronation of King George I., where he says—

> "Redeem us, Sire, from things our country loathes,
> Subverting patronages, ranting oaths,
> Such was the woeful, dubious *abjuration*
> Which gave the clergy ground of speculation."

At the same time, Mr Erskine displayed the spirit of Christian meekness and forbearance, as is shown from an extract from one of his sermons at that time. "The miseries of the Church," he says, "and the sins that bring them on, are heart-rending things to the people of God; and particularly, their hearts are rent for the lusts of the Church; *For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.* For my own part, I am but a person of little experience in the world, and therefore I desire to be modest at this juncture, about *the present rent* among us. It is plain that the anger of the Lord hath divided us, and rent us in twain, like

the veil of the temple, from the top to the bottom. God is angry because we have sinned."

When the rebellion broke out in 1715, he did not fail to exhort his people, and rouse their zeal to help them to defend their civil and religious liberties; and when, in the following year, Argyle marched to Perth to dispossess the rebels, a solemn fast was held, on which Mr Erskine preached from Lament. iii. 37-40, and earnestly charged the people to humble themselves before God on account of their sins and provocations. Adverting to the probable consequences of the success of the rebellion, he says,—"As some of this Popish and Jacobite party have threatened, so we have no reason to doubt, that, if they prevail, *their little fingers will be heavier than their fathers' loins.* Therefore we have all reason to pray and cry to God this day, for success to the Protestant forces against that Popish and desperately-inclined party. It is reasonable and seasonable, that, when the forces are fighting for us, we should be praying for them, and fasting too."

Mr Erskine took the deepest interest in the *Marrow Controversy,* before noticed in the life of his brother. He seems to have been the first to write Mr Boston an encouraging letter when the book was condemned in the Assembly of 1720, and none embarked in the cause with greater alacrity, or supported it with greater decision and activity than he did.

He also tenderly sympathised with brethren who

suffered under tedious and harrassing processes for their faithfulness in preaching doctrines like those contained in *The Marrow of Divinity*. For example, Mr Gabriel Wilson of Manton, having preached at the opening of the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale, a "faithful and excellent sermon," entitled "The Trust," and being condemned for the same, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine travelled together, once at least, to Kelso, to give their countenance to that esteemed brother, when he appeared as a panel at the bar of his Synod. The following rapartee was given on that occasion. Mr Ramsay of Kelso, one of Mr Wilson's keenest adversaries, said to the younger Erskine, "Ralph, they say you are a poet; will you favour me with a specimen of your poetry?" "Yes, sir," he instantly replied; and, alluding to the Christian name of their obnoxious friend, said *impromptu*—

> "We be two angels who did ride and run,
> To see the angel Gabriel fight and won."

To vindicate the true Scripture doctrine of grace was one of the principal designs of Mr Erskine for writing the "Gospel Sonnets," in particular the sixth book, entitled "The Believer's Principles," which contains a variety of "spiritual songs,"—the difference between the law and the Gospel, and the ground of a sinner's justification before God. The vast importance of our Lord's divinity, and the guilt and danger of denying

or relinquishing this doctrine, he often alludes to, both in his sermons and sonnets. In one place he says,—"Whatever doctrine tends to the disparagement of Christ, or to the robbing Him of any part of salvation work is to be rejected as erroneous; *for to Him alone must the gathering of the people be;* and to Him only shall the glory of our whole salvation, from first to last, belong."

And in the sonnets are the following stanzas:—

> "My Lord appears; awake my soul,
> Admire His name—*the Wonderful*—
> An infinite and finite mind,
> Eternity and time conjoined.
> All heaven's astonished at His form,
> The mighty God become a worm.
> Down Arian pride to Him shall bow;
> He's Jesus and Jehovah too."

But among the public events to which his name is most attached is the Secession from the Church, which took place two years after his brother Ebenezer and other four left it. We have already seen, in the life of Ebenezer, what drove these four brethren to take the step they did in the matter. All along, Mr Ralph Erskine deeply sympathised with the Secessionists, but he felt for a time considerable difficulty in bringing his mind to join them. At length, after much anxious reflection, and repeated communications with the brethren, he considered it his duty to follow them,

and of this he writes in his diary,—"On Wednesday, Feb. 16th, 1737, I gave in an adherence to the Secession, explaining what I meant by it. May the Lord pity and lead."

For some time it was hoped that the Secession from the Church would not be final, but in 1740 the Assembly fairly shut the door against their return, and banished from her pale the very cream of her ministers and people.

The year before the final disruption, the attached members of Mr Erskine's congregation, fearing the worst, contributed willingly and largely for the erection of a new place of worship, when his deposition by the Assembly rendered this measure indispensible. Mr Wardlaw differed in opinion with Mr Erskine in regard to the Secession, and although the intimate co-pastoral relations which had long subsisted between them were dissolved, they continued to regard each other with mutual esteem.

The great majority of the congregation, as well as most of the members of session, concurred with Mr Erskine, however, and with him left the Established Church. Accordingly, a large church, capable of accommodating about two thousand people, was soon erected, and there the faithful minister preached until death removed him.

It would have been a great comfort to Mr Erskine, if Mr Wardlaw had seen eye to eye with him in this

matter, but an all-wise Providence judged otherwise; however, they tried to agree while they differed, as we see from the following notice in the diary:—"This evening my colleague came to my house with another gentleman; and having taken my colleague alone, I talked with him, in a friendly way, about the peace and concord we should study; declaring I had made no secession from him, and that we ought to abstain from every word that should seem to import as if there were any difference in public betwixt him and me, to which he assented. And I found him, and the people generally more easy than I had feared."

Notwithstanding all this, the mutual harmony of of these excellent men was somewhat impaired.

In the life of Ebenezer Erskine, mention was made of the intercourse, and afterwards disagreement, between the associate brethren and Whitefield, in which Ralph bore so large a part. The story need not be repeated here; it cannot justly be disputed, that when the correspondence began Ralph Erskine was actuated in this matter by unfeigned Christian affection, and aimed at something nobler than the advancement of a party. Neither can it be proved, that when they met together their personal interviews were less satisfactory than they had allowed themselves to anticipate; but notwithstanding that they parted in anger, and this supplies another example of human infirmity, as a warning to Christians in succeeding times.

The only other public event in which Mr Erskine took a deep interest, was in reference to the Burgess Oath; and no one suffered more severely from his wish to support what he thought the right side at the time, than he did. Firmly persuaded that it was not lawful on the part of any Seceder to take the Burgess Oath, he, with three other brethren, was singled out to receive ecclesiastical censure from those brethren who differed from him, and amongst those was his own son, the Rev. John Erskine of Leslie. "You may be sure," wrote the poor father, "it was as a sword piercing my heart, to see that Johnny was sitting in the midst of them." Nevertheless, the father, however irritated and vexed, confessed that "what John did was from conscience," which helped to mitigate the blow; and of this trial the good man wrote,—"God is trying us, but when tried, we shall come forth as gold. May the Lord be with us, and we shall fear no evil going through the dark valley."

CHAPTER VII.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach."—1 TIMOTHY iii. 2.

WE have gone thus far in our history of this good man, and faithful servant of God, without touching on his domestic life.

On the 15th July 1714, nearly three years after his ordination, he married Margaret, daughter of John Dewar, Esquire of Lassodie, an estate in the parish of Beath. She proved an eminent blessing to her husband, from her high Christian graces, as well as from the sweetness of her natural temper. She was spared to him sixteen years, and had ten children, five of whom survived her. We have few notices in his diary of her life and the death of her children; but from a letter to a friend at the time of her decease, and by remarks afterwards, we see how much he had valued her, and how worthy she was of his love.

Part of this letter may be given, as it shows so clearly the loving heart of the man. He says:—

"Your kind, sympathising letter came to my hand on Saturday at noon, when I was alone in my closet, and my soul eating bitter herbs in great plenty, insomuch that I could not read your compassionate line without bedewing it with tears of sorrow at the occasion of it, and joy upon occasion of the Lord's goodness, in stirring you up to take a lift of my burden, which I take to be one of the fruits and effects of His sympathy, who is the burden-bearer, and who has said, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

'Dear Brother,—I may say with Ezekiel (xxiv. 18), 'I spake unto the people in the morning, and at even my wife died.' I lectured in the forenoon, preached in the afternoon, heard the exercises in the evening, and after that saw some sick persons, and all this time the Lord saw fit to hide it from my eyes that my dear wife was dying. Though I knew she was in distress that day and two or three days before, yet it was not reckoned mortal by any but herself; for she many a time expressed her apprehensions of death, not only then, but a long time before; and it is part of my grief that these advertisements were so overlooked by me, and that I had so little will to believe what I now find to be true. Her last words expressed the deepest humiliation, and greatest submission to the sovereign will of God, that words could manifest, and thereafter, she shut up all with that,—'O Death, where is thy

sting! O Grave, where is thy victory! Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!'—which she repeated two or three times over. And yet, even at this time, I knew not that they were her dying words, till instantly I perceived the evident symptoms of death; in view whereof I was plunged, as it were, into a sea of confusion, when she, in less than an hour after, in a most soft and easy manner, departed this life.

"She was one that had piety and seriousness, without the least noise or show; virtue and industry, without vanity or levity; and the greatest kindness and care, especially towards me, all the lifetime we had together, which was sixteen years. And now my groaning is sometimes heavy, and yet my stroke is heavier than my groanings; but it is the Lord, and therefore it becomes me to be dumb and not to open my mouth, because He did it. O pray to Him, that He may sanctify this providence, and that Christ Himself may be more than ever the desire of my heart, since He has taken away the desire of my eyes, with a stroke."

Two years after the death of his first wife, he married again, Margaret Simson, daughter of Daniel Simson, Esquire, W.S., Edinburgh. The contract of marriage entered into at that time is mentioned in the following terms:—

"*January* 12, 1732.—I looked to the Lord this

morning and urged Him that He would do for me for His name's sake, and I was helped. . . . . The meeting was managed without any altercation, and the frame of the contract was agreed upon with much harmony. I had told, again and again, that I had nothing to contract but myself and providence."

The celebration of the marriage is thus recorded :—

"*February* 24, 1732.—I was married by my brother Ebenezer, at Edinburgh, to Mrs Margaret Simson. Sometime after the marriage, I called my wife alone, and prayed with her."

As to how he went about this second marriage-relationship of his, we get an idea from extracts from his journal of his letters to her during their courtship.

Of the time he first began to think of her as his wife, we read thus :—"Also, I prayed that if she, ————, were the person I should see after, the Lord, the Angel of the Covenant, the Angel of angels, might guide and direct me. I was made to look to God in the promise, that He would lead me in the right way, in a way I know not, in a way I have not known—that he might do these things, and not forsake me." Then in his first letter to her, of Dec. 8, 1731, he says :—"As it is in itself no light affair for one to be called in providence to be a wife and a mother at once, so my heart bears me witness, that it has been no light matter unto me, to have the conduct and direction of heaven in my choice ; which if I am

favoured with, it is not great things in the world I desire to aim at, knowing from experience that bountiful Providence has made my cup to run over many times, when I have been far from laying down measure to that end;" and he concludes by requesting her "to spread his proposal before the Lord," imploring His direction.

After being encouraged to go forward with his suit, he writes, and hopes she will "prove a help, comfort, and blessing to himself and his family—which I also hope," he continues, "will be comfortable to you, and easily managed to your satisfaction, whose temper and disposition, so far as I have heard or can discern, is such as I expect will be agreeable to me and them. Such is my natural endearment to the five children the Lord has spared to me, that, if I were *trysted* with one in a conjugal relation with me that was of a rugged and unkindly disposition towards them, I doubt not but it would contribute to hasten me with sorrow to my grave."

Then a third letter, bearing date, January 31st 1732, gratefully acknowledges a kind reply she had sent him, and contains the following passage:—"It has been part of my prayer that you may be filled with much of the spirit of love to Christ, and in Him to me and my children, and I desire it may be part of your prayer also; for that love is the purest and sweetest that is of His creating by His Holy Spirit,

and that is founded upon love to Himself. Such love among friends and relations makes the life sweet, and every desire easy and pleasant. It ennobles the soul, and elevates it far beyond all natural pleasures."

That same day he writes in his journal:—"This morning, after reading some Scripture, I went to prayer. . . . . I acknowledged the Lord might righteously write bitter things against me; but I looked to Jesus who had drunk the bitter cup, and was made sin for me; and through Him I sought to be blessed, particularly in this matter of my intended marriage. I was made again to commit my bride to the Lord. Having read that word, 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths' (Prov. iii. 6). I now acknowledged that a prudent wife was from Him, and that the qualifying a wife for me was from Him. I acknowledged him as a promising God, to whom I looked for the blessing, and sought her as a blessing to me and to my children. And here again the poor lass, and the four lads were rolled over upon that covenant,—'Thy God and the God of thy seed.' I looked upon them as not my children, but the children of God, His concern. I was made to seek that the Lord, who had taken away their mother, and left them orphans, would provide a mother for them, and make my bride a loving, kindly mother to them. Here, with all my heart melting, and my eyes dissolved in tears, I was made to seek

that the Lord would create love in her heart, first to God, and then in Him to me, and to the children. . . Lord, hear, though it is not man's way to love or delight in children not our own, even when marriage takes place, yet God's way being the way of love, contrary to man's way, which is the way of hatred, strife, and variance, I thought the promise might be accomplished in a way like Himself, that His name and truth and faithfulness might appear. Glory to God for what impression of Himself He has been pleased to allow me, both last night and this morning."

These fervent prayers were answered to the full, and Margaret Simson proved indeed a faithful, loving wife to him, and a tender mother to his children. Neither was this good man slack to acknowledge these blessings, and again we read—

"*June* 14, 1732.—I was made to bless the Lord for His goodness in providing me a wife whose temper was so pleasant and peaceable."

Again, "*Jan.* 1, 1734.—When sitting at breakfast, Johnny not being well, I observed the care that my wife and her aunt took of him and the rest; and my heart blessed the Lord, that he from day to day provided, and I was helped to dependence on Him as a Heavenly Father."

Then we see how these two, bound together in the nearest of earthly ties, helped to strenghten and comfort one another. He writes thus:—"Last night I

talked with my wife about the sacrament; and found she had been at a table that Mr Fisher served. She told me of the struggle she had before the event, and yet that she did not repent going, because she got Christ applied in communicating, but durst not speak with confidence of it." Again,—"This morning I had some edifying conversation with my wife, and in speaking to me I found her affected, and her eyes dropping tears. I spoke to her of our making Christ our refuge, how little we need to fear death, if the sting were removed; and how our stupidity, deadness, darkness, and other heart plagues, were so many reasons for our looking to the Lord Jesus for healing."

CHAPTER VIII.

DOMESTIC LIFE—Continued.

"One that ruleth his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity.—1 Timothy iii. 4.

WE have seen Mr Erskine in particular as a husband, but a few extracts from his journal will show him as a father—how he was especially distinguished for ardent, sanctified affection in that relation. We saw how anxious he was to secure for them a tender, loving mother, after they were left, by the death of his first wife, motherless. Before his second marriage, he has this entry:—"My heart was poured out before God on behalf of my children, fleeing with them to the covenant, which says, 'I will be thy God and the God of thy seed,' and to that Jesus who said, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me.' Are they left, said I, in my hand? Aye they are ruined and lost there, if those take not the charge of them; therefore I put them into the hand of God, into the hand of Christ."

Again,—"I plainly said to God that he knew I had no other ground to hope upon than His covenant and

promise, or a "Thus saith the Lord;" and so I was made, with fervour and freedom, on the score of free sovereign grace manifested through Christ in the promise, to pray that He would be a God to Peggy, a God to Harry, a God to Johnny, a God to Ebie, and a God to Jamie."

The feelings of holy gratitude when he heard of the birth of a child is expressed thus:—

"*Tuesday*, Dec. 5, 1732.—After some rest, I was awakened by Mrs Spence telling me that my wife was delivered of a man child about six o'clock. I arose and praised the Lord for His goodness, and dedicated the child to God, pleading this deliverance might be a double deliverance to my wife, both inward and outward; inward and spiritual, so that she might be delivered from all spiritual bands, and that her heart might be enlarged to magnify the Lord. Afterwards I gave the child to God, 'looking to the covenant (Gen. xvii. 7), as sealed with the blood of Christ, and as all my hope."

Then, "*Dec.* 12, 1732," we have next, "This morning, having read in my ordinary, namely, Jer. xxii., Psalm cvi., and Col. ii., there was something, particularly in that last chapter, which I thought suited my present circumstances, designing the baptism of my child this day; and upon this I prayed that my child might be buried with Christ in baptism and raised with Him; that he might be baptised with the Holy

Ghost, that God might be to him, according to the promise, his God; and I was made with sweet freedom, viewing the covenant of promise in Christ, to cast over the child upon God in Christ for the blessing of baptism, and for the washing in the blood of Christ.

"This evening my child Ralph was baptised by my colleague, Mr Wardlaw. Providence led him to speak upon Gen. xvii. 7, 'I will establish my covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.' When he read that text it was like marrow to my bones, and made my flesh, in a manner, creep with surprise. I desired to bless the Lord for it, and heard with satisfaction many things said on it; and when I was standing up taking on the engagements, in which my colleague dealt very modestly, binding me to what I was accustomed to bind others to, and when he said, 'these things you promise through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,' my heart cordially went to it, and to the dedicating of the child to the Lord. Then after baptism and prayer, because night was coming on, he caused to be sung the last verse of Psalm cxliv—

'Those people happy are who be
In such a case as this;
Yea, blessed all those people are
Whose God Jehovah is.'

And herein my heart joined, and I cordially committed myself and family to the Lord. Glory to God for the blessing of this day."

Not only did Mr Erskine pray with his children during the stated times of domestic worship, but he made it his practice occasionally to take them separately, as well as collectively, and pray with, and give them appropriate advice.

At times we have a notice such as this—"The Lord pitied me this evening after the exercise. When I came home and my wife had sent the children, Peggy, Harry, Johnny, and Ebie to me—having heard of Harry and Johnny sometimes casting out in the school, I was helped very gravely to exhort and admonish them, and solemnly also at this time to call them to remembrance of their baptismal vows and engagements, which, being come to the years of capacity, they ought to consider and take upon themselves."

He takes notice repeatedly of his spiritual conversation with his sons alone, and also of his attention to their literary progress. "*Oct.* 12, 1735.—The sacrament was at Queensferry, eight days ago. Before this, my sons, Harry and John, proposed that they might have liberty to go there, which I granted. Some days after that, I inquired if they had a mind to participate. I found Johnny more clear on that head. He gave me some account of the Lord's ways towards him."

The father's heart especially seems to have gone out to his surviving daughter, Margaret. Of her he writes—"*April* 14, 1732.—This day my daughter Peggy was sent to Stirling to my brother, to be further taught. I was sorry to part with her, finding her so careful still about me, which appeared partly that day I went to the Synod last week. When I was going off amid the rain, she dealt with me to stay, and the tear gushed in her eye. I noticed much of her mother's temper and careful disposition about her."

In the trials of his life he had the sympathy and help of his family, and so we read when he was greatly exercised about leaving the church, that he appointed a family fast; and of this he writes:—"I called all my family together that were capable, and spent the whole forenoon in prayer, singing, and reading in the Bible and Larger Catechism,—reading the duties required, and the sins forbidden, in every command; intermixing prayer and praise, confession and supplication. O may the Lord follow it with His especial blessing." Again—"*Monday, Jan.* 15, 1739. —I set apart this day forenoon with my family, because the praying societies were to meet, by the advice of the Associate Presbytery, for humiliation and prayer, for the Lord's ordering public concerns, now when a libel is forcing against us." His exercises of prayer and fasting he afterwards continued one day

in the week, alone and with his family alternately. Two of Mr Erskine's children were visited with that fearful scourge, the small-pox, and of this event he writes—"*Sept.* 13, 1732.—My concern this morning about the children was, that I did not wish them to be spared unless it was for His glory, and that I would take His sparing, if He did so, as a token He would provide for them, bless them, and be their God." "*Sabbath, Sept.* 15.—In the evening, Ralph became worse. I prayed with my wife, in prospect of his death." "*Sept.* 16.—This forenoon, my wife coming into my room, concerned in the views of Ralph's illness, who seemed to be dying, I went with her to my knees, and there devoted him to the Lord, craving it might be recorded in heaven, that we, the parents of the child, at Christ's call, came to bring the child to Him, that, whatever He did with the body, his soul might be blessed and saved to the praise of His glorious grace, and that he might be a part of *Heaven's plenishing*. . . . . After this I prayed beside the child and the company, and was therein helped to some exercise of the same kind in secret. About eight o'clock *my child Ralph died.* I endeavoured meantime to comfort my wife. . . . . My heart was especially poured out and mightily melted, in praying for the blessing of this rod to my wife and me—that it might be a means of purging away my dross, and that it might be blessed to the

family, particularly to the servant, Jean, who had waited carefully on the child."

"*Friday, Sept.* 20.—This day, about nine o'clock, I interred the body of my son Ralph in the place where my sister and five of my children were buried. Glory to God, for the ground of hope through Jesus Christ."

"*Friday, Jan.* 24, 1735.—The child Daniel grows still weaker. I was called to see him, and prayed for him with the family. *Wednesday.*—Early this morning *my son Daniel died.* I was helped to-day to look to the Lord, that He would bless this providence to my afflicted wife, when all the stock sprung of her body was cut off. I observed her many times greatly affected." "*Jan.* 30.—I buried the corpse of my young son Daniel beside the rest of my children."

Then there came a second little Ralph to gladden the parents' heart; but not long was he to be spared to them, for the Lord had again need of him in heaven, and so the poor father writes, during his illness:—"*Sabbath, April* 9, 1738.—This morning I was raised to see the child on whom the disease was continuing to increase. I prayed, in company with the rest, and then retired to my room. I looked to the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and the blood of the Lamb sprinkling the mercy-seat, and sealing the covenant of promise; and on this ground my heart was made somewhat easy with respect to the child."

"*Monday, April* 10.—This morning I was wakened to see the child die. Then I went to the room where he and the people were; and in prayer I was led to run to the name of the Lord, as a strong tower, and, under a gale of influence, to leave the child in the midst of the tower, expecting he would be saved for the sake of God's great name. A little after this, the child departed this life."

In his Gospel Sonnets, Ralph Erskine says, and he speaks from experience:—

> "In heavenly choirs a question rose,
> That stirred up strife will never close,—
> What rank in all the ransomed race,
> Owes highest praise to sovereign grace?
>
> Babes thither caught from womb and breast,
> Claimed right to sing above the rest;
> Because they found the happy shore
> They never saw nor sought before."

But not only was the good man called to part with these little ones—he lived to mourn the loss of those who were his stay and comfort, and to whom his heart clung tenderly. He went and saw his daughter, the Peggy whom he had loved so well, and felt that it would be the last time, for the hand of death was upon her; and he writes to her on his return, for she had gone from the parents' roof to the home of her husband:—"However sorry I am to part with you so soon, I desire to be still, and know that He is God. I

know not how soon my own departure may be at hand. Meantime it has pleased Him to bereave me; Ebie is not, Johnny is not; and if He be calling for you also, even He whose right is to give and to take as He pleases, O may He loose your heart wholly from this world, and enable you to take a *dead grip* of Christ, into whose hands I commend your spirit." And when she died, the bereaved father still blessed God, and confessed that He did all things well.

We saw, in the life of Ebenezer, what a kind and faithful brother he was to him. United alike by the bonds of nature and grace, associated in the ministry of the Gospel, and residing not far from each other, theirs was a life-long friendship, without any difference. They rejoiced in each other's prosperity, and sympathised in each other's sorrows.

In like manner did his sisters share largely in his brotherly affection, and then his nephews and nieces, for all of whom he entertained the deepest regard, and many of his letters are addressed to them, on such occasions as their marriages, etc.

And in friendship he was as faithful and true. Communicative, generous, candid, he recommended himself, in no common degree, to all whom he favoured with a share of his regard. He entered into their circumstances and feelings with sincerity and warmth, and was ever ready to promote their true happiness by his prayers, counsels, and efforts.

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH AND CHARACTER.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."—Rev. xiv. 13.

MR ERSKINE, it may almost be said, died in harness. He preached on Sabbath, the 22nd of October 1752, and of this he remarks:—"I preached in the afternoon, and, when alone, I had some secret freedom in putting my name under the shadow of that name of the Lord that is my strong tower, and in seeking He might be with me till death, and in death, making his word my comfort and support."

Mrs Erskine having repeatedly expressed her regret that his close application to study deprived her so much of his society, he told her one day that the work he intended for the press was finished, and "she might soon expect a little more of his company for some time (he had just finished his Scripture Songs), but it would not be long till she should be deprived of it altogether."

He persisted, however, in the active discharge of duty, until he was seized with his last illness, and died on Monday, 6th November 1752. Of this sad event, his son writes to a cousin, "The Lord liveth, blessed be our Rock. He has been pleased to visit us, in His holy providence, with the very awful and affecting stroke of my father's death. He died yesterday, a quarter after three in the afternoon, of a nervous fever, being the eighth day of the fever. He preached here last Sabbath save one, with very remarkable life and fervency. He spoke but little all the time, for the disease did not evidently appear to be present death approaching, and the physicians had ordered care to be taken to keep him quiet. But after he had the remarkable and sudden change to the worse, which was not till Sabbath, he then spoke a great deal, but could not be understood; only, among his last words he was heard to say, "I will be for ever a debtor to free grace."

Thus died Mr Ralph Erskine. His last words were, "Victory, victory, victory!"

His remains were interred in the churchyard of Dunfermline, on Thursday, November 9, by his surviving relatives and friends, in the presence of a vast concourse of spectators. A stone, on which was inscribed a Latin epitaph, was placed over his grave.

In 1849 a monument was erected in front of the church, at Dunfermline, where he so long ministered.

The figure, which is of large monumental size, represents Erskine in the dress of the period,—full-skirted, large-cuffed coat, breeches and stockings.

The extracts we have been enabled to give from the diary of Mr Erskine, prove him to be a man of piety and prayer. We see him through it *carefully observing the events of providence, watchful over his own spirit, minutely examining the state of his heart and character, very regular and attentive in the perusal of Scripture, and, above all, having strong faith in God, and deep and true zeal for His glory, and the good of souls.* Other virtues, however, may be touched upon. He was very humble — indeed, clothed with humility; and, as an example of this, the following lines written on him may be quoted:—

> "An holy, humble course of life he steered,
> That all might see the doctrine which they heard;
> His presence grave did reverence great command,
> And crave profound respect from every hand.
> His very look could vanity declaim,
> His countenance put levity to shame."

This humility was shown in his readiness to do justice to the merits and popularity of other ministers, and to own when he himself failed. One instance of this is given, when both his brother and he preached on the Monday after the celebration of the Lord's Supper at Glasgow. Ebenezer delivered an excellent discourse; but Ralph fell short of his usual fluency and

fervour. On his brother noticing this, Ralph said, "True brother; but if my poor sermon humble me, perhaps I shall reap greater advantage from it than your great sermon." Then he writes to Mr Whitefield, —"It refreshes me to hear that any of my poor writings in verse or prose have been and are blessed, in this or any other part of the earth. If I travel by pen as far as you do in person, and contribute my mite for spreading the Gospel light, I rejoice in it, and bless His name for it, who has ordered this beyond my view and expectation."

He had a gentle, forgiving spirit, and often a ready answer to disarm adversaries. One day, as he and Mr Willison of Dundee were talking about the joys of heaven, a lady present, who was warmly attached to the Established Church, remarked, "Aye, sir, there will be no Secession in heaven." "O, madam," he instantly replied "you are under a mistake; for in heaven there will be a complete secession from all sin and sorrow."

A traditional anecdote is told in Scotland. He was fond of music, and some of his more strait-laced hearers feeling scandalized by a report that he played on the violin, a deputation of grave elders was appointed to wait upon him. Ralph produced his violincello, and treated the elders to a solemn psalm tune, with which they were highly gratified, and assured the people that "the minister did not play on the *wee sinfu' fiddle* they had imagined."

His "Gospel Sonnets," once so popular, cannot be compared with master-pieces of lyric poetry, but here and there is a pathos and dignity, from the greatness of his theme, which finds its way into every congenial heart. Take the following as an example:—

"Heaven Desired by Saints on Earth."

"Happy the company that's gone
From cross to crown, from thrall to throne;
How loud they sing upon the shore,
To which they sailed in heart before!

"Blessed are the dead, yea, saith the Word,
That die in Christ the living Lord,
And, on the other side of death,
Thus joyful spend their praising breath:

"Death from all death has set us free,
And will our gain for ever be;
Death loosed the massy chain of woe,
To let the mournful captives go.

"Death is to us a sweet repose,
The bud was op'd to show the rose;
The cage was broke to let us fly,
And build our happy nest on high."

Another quotation from the Sonnets may be given, in which the Gospel is offered in all its freeness—

"Come down, Zaccheus, quickly come,
Salvation's brought into thy home;
In vain thou climb'st the legal tree,
Salvation freely comes to thee.

"Thou dream'st of coming up to terms—
Come down into My saving arms;
Down, down, and get a pardon free,
On terms already wrought by Me."

At length the controversy begun on earth is ended in heaven, each redeemed sinner endeavouring to excel the other in gratitude—

"Tis I," said one, "'bove all my race
Am debtor chief to glorious grace;"
"Nay," said another, "hark, I trow,
I'm more obliged to grace than thou."

"Stay," said a third, "I deepest share
In owing praise beyond compare;
The chief of sinners you'll allow,
Must be the chief of singers now."

As we saw, Ralph Erskine died saying, "I will ever be a debtor to free grace."

It was remarked, in the beginning of Ebenezer Erskine's Life, that these men and that age were noted for long-fasting, much-reading, and deep-thinking theology, and we see a sample of such in the Erskines and their friends. Stately, strong, and thrilling, the Gospel spread over the land, and men's hearts became soft and plastic, to receive it, and obey its every requirement, however hard to flesh and blood these might be. It was Britain's most earnest century, for the Puritans in England were embued with the same

spirit as was seen in Baxter, Alleine, and Howe. It might be that, with the eye rivcted on the future, the things of earth became too trivial and short-lived. Well, it is a fault, if fault it was, that there is little chance of us committing.

We have said little of Ralph Erskine as a sermon-writer; and perhaps, to a volatile people such as a modern congregation is composed of, such a body of divinity would be appalling, for the sermons of such men were a series. They loved order and system; their congregations were more stationary; and perhaps the regular treatment of the same theme in Scriptural teaching, tended to the spiritual growth of the hearers in a way we cannot now understand.

Mr Ralph Erskine's sermons were published in two folio volumes, after his death, and contain about one hundred and forty sermons, on some seventy different texts of Scripture. The perfect freeness of the Gospel was the burden of his Sonnets, as it was the key-note of his sermons. His taste was classical, and his genius might have tempted him to high flights; but his piety kept him simple, and made him preach on a level with his flock; and the sermons of both brothers were once the favourite reading of the pious Scottish peasantry.

The late Dr John Mason, of New York, said, that "when ten years of age, he was the subject of deep religious impressions. He has often remarked, inci-

dentally, that at that period, he took Ralph Erskine's 'Faith's Plea upon God's Word' to the garret of his residence, and read, and wept, and prayed."

"Who do you think," asked an eminent London bookseller, last winter, "is the most popular religious writer at present?" "I cannot tell," was the answer. "It is Ralph Erskine," was the reply; "we sell more of his writings than of any other divine, Scotch or English."

If space permitted, we could have liked to have given a few specimens of Mr Ralph Erskine's style as a preacher; we must content ourselves with one or two extracts from what is a remarkable discourse preached by him, at the ordination of a brother minister; it is called "Gospel Compulsion," and in this lukewarm age, it would be well if such a faithful charge to clergymen was showered by thousands over the land.

The text is from Luke xiv. 23, "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

"The duty of ministers and their work. Their work is not only *driving* work, while they preach the law as the schoolmaster to lead to Christ; but it is also *drawing* work, while they preach the Gospel of Christ, who was lifted up to draw men to Him by His love and grace. Their work is *winning* work, seeking to win souls to Christ, *compelling them to come in*; and their work is *filling* work, that their Master's house may be filled; and that every corner, every seat, every

chamber, every storey of His house may be filled. As long as the Gospel is preached, His house is filling; and as long as there is room in His house, there is work for the minister; his work is never over, so long as His Master's house is empty; *compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

"Further, their duty is (as the context points out),—1*st*, To go out into the wide world, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And as they must go out *to* the world, so they must go out *of* the world and out *of* themselves. 2*nd*. *To go out quickly*,—to lose no time, for sinners are in hazard of perishing eternally; and we must hasten to pluck them as brands out of the burning. *Now is the accepted time*, now is the spirit promised. 3*d*. To let them know *we are in earnest* for our Master, and endeavour not to tickle their fancy but to touch their heart; to compel them by importunity and to take no refusal. 4*th*. However many have come in, we are to tell them that *yet there is room for more*, and that Christ's heart is open, and His riches inexhaustible; and that, in His house there is bread enough and to spare. 5*th*. The zeal of His house must eat us up; for our concern must be that His house is filled; the number of the elect must be completed, and the rest left inexcusable. All that the Father hath given Me shall come to Him; yea, these He must bring and they shall hear His voice. . . . .

"Our Master's house is like the New Jerusalem that hath three gates to every airt, Rev. xxi. 13, '*On the east three gates, on the west three gates, on the south three gates, and on the north three gates.*' And all the gates of His house are open. Where dwell you, man, woman? in Scotland or England? in the east or in the west? in the north or in the south? O come in, come in; for the gates are open to you, Isa. xliii. 5, '*I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather them from the west. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.*' If you, or any of you, go away thinking or saying that there was not a word said to you, I take all the four airts of heaven, east, west, north, and south, to witness that you are called in. . . . Oh, come in, poor sinner! let me compel you to come in to Jesus Christ, who is ready to welcome you to His house and heart, both at once. Come in now! O, come in believing, and if you cannot believe, come looking to the Author of faith, crying, 'Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.' If you would fain come and want my help, there is my hand. May the Lord Himself persuade you all, and *compel* you *to come in, that His house may be filled.*"